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L A N D

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:
SKERRETT
THE MARTYR
HOLLYWOOD CEMETERY
FAMINE

L A N D

by

LIAM O'FLAHERTY

LONDON

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NOTE

Every character in this book is entirely fictitious
and no reference whatever is intended to any
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CHAPTER I

IT WAS SHORTLY BEFORE NOON of a day in March 1879, at the village of Manister on the coast of County Mayo. Elizabeth Henry St. George was sitting at her desk in a corner of the living-room at Manister Lodge, drawing up the household weekly accounts. Being short-sighted, she was bending low over the sheet of paper that lay in front of her on the desk, touching each word with the tip of her quill pen as she read, when the sound of firearms being discharged at a distance made her start violently.

"Gracious me!" she cried, sitting rigidly erect in her chair. "Who can be fowling on a day like this?"

The shooting continued. First there had been three shots fired in rapid succession. Then there was a pause, followed by another burst of rapid firing. At least a dozen shots were fired.

"That is not fowling," Elizabeth said to herself. "Definitely not. What on earth can it be?"

She shuddered with aversion as she got to her feet. She had just turned forty-eight during the previous month. She looked sixty. Her hair was completely grey and quite thin above her forehead. She wore it plaited stiffly, in a prim bunch, at the nape of her neck. This drew attention to the pallor and emaciation of her face. It was like the face of an old nun, worn by a life of self-imposed hardships, yet showing the calmness and strength that come from discipline. Her whole body was remarkably thin. Her bosom scarcely made any impression against the cloth of her tight-fitting brown bodice, which was buttoned stiffly up along her neck to her chin, with a narrow lace frill at the top.

She went over to the window, one hand on a bunch of household keys that hung from her waist by a chain, the other hand gripping her long, wide skirts. She walked very erect, with little mincing steps. The tips of her shoes kept appearing and disappearing. They made no audible sound on the worn carpet. Only the rustling of the dark skirts could be heard.

A single shot was fired as she reached the window. This report seemed to come from some place much nearer than the previous ones. The sound re-echoed slightly. Elizabeth shuddered. Looking at the condition of the weather, she was now entirely convinced that the shots did not come from the guns of sportsmen. The mist

was so heavy that she could see no farther than the edge of the narrow terrace beyond the window.

"I'm sure something dreadful is happening," she said to herself.

Hurrying back to her desk, she picked up a light shawl that had lain folded neatly over the back of her chair. She threw it about her head and shoulders, opened the french window and walked on to the terrace. The air was extremely mild, in spite of the heavy mist and the time of year. Indeed, the mist seemed to be a veil behind which the mighty lust of the breeding earth pricked forth to a renewal of growth. From this unseen activity a luxury of smell issued with joyful violence, invading the senses with its intoxicating power. To Elizabeth, made nervous by the shooting, this exuberance of Nature was a further incentive to alarm.

"God grant that it's nothing unpleasant!" she prayed, walking along the terrace towards the gable of the house.

She moved slowly over the smooth flagstones, between the ivy-covered house-wall and the arched trellis vines that framed the outer rim of the terrace. The mist had covered the green vines with a lacy shroud, as if magic spiders had worked all night to make a garment for the shrubs. She halted on reaching the gable, cocked her ears and listened. There was no further sound of firing. Here the soft murmur of the sea was distinct. Its smell was fierce and invigorating, in sharp contrast with the luxurious perfume of the earth.

Suddenly she heard her niece singing near at hand.

"Lettice," she called out eagerly, "where are you?"

The singing stopped at once and a girl's voice answered gaily:

"Here I am, Aunt Elizabeth."

A few moments later, Lettice came into sight between two dark-green shrubs, whose pot-bellied trunks stood guard on either side of a sharp turn in the path that led around the gable of the house. On seeing her aunt, she held out a large bunch of daffodils in her right hand.

"Daffodils, Aunt Elizabeth," she cried excitedly.

She came forward over the gravelled path at a run, holding her skirts high up with her left hand.

"Imagine!" she cried in a musical voice on reaching Elizabeth. "Wild daffodils in March! There were thousands of them along the banks of the river. I wanted to go on picking and picking. I had no idea that daffodils bloomed so early. They have an exquisite scent."

Elizabeth sniffed at the flowers without interest.

"Did you hear shooting just now, Lettice?" she said.

"I did hear shooting," Lettice said. "Why?"

"Never mind," Elizabeth said, touching the girl on the sleeve. "You're quite wet. You shouldn't have gone out in this mist. It's very dangerous at this time of year. I'm sure your feet are soaking wet. Hurry into the house and change your clothes."

"But I don't feel in the least wet," Lettice said gaily as she followed her aunt along the terrace. "On the contrary, I feel almost too warm after the climb uphill from the river."

"All the more reason to be careful," Elizabeth said. "You must change at once. The Irish climate is very treacherous. You'll soon discover that."

"But I've been here a month now," Lettice said, "and I never felt so well in my life before, even though there has been a great deal of rain and I've got drenched several times. Really, I think the Irish climate is much healthier than the French climate."

She certainly looked in radiant health, even though her face was rather thin and without colour. When she entered the living-room and took off her hat, a great cloud of red-gold hair appeared on her crown.

"Give me those flowers," Elizabeth said after closing the window. "Take off your cloak. Let me see if your dress is wet."

"I don't know why you insist on thinking I'm delicate," Lettice said as she took off her cloak. "I'm really very hardy."

Elizabeth touched her niece's dress in several places. Then she frowned.

"It's quite dry, I admit," she said grudgingly, "although I do wish you'd let me get you more suitable clothes. Even in summer, my dear, you have to wear heavy stuff here in Mayo. The peasants never distinguish between summer and winter in the matter of dress. They know best. They live closest to the wickedness of our climate. Run along now and change your shoes. Tell Annie to fetch me some water for those daffodils. I'll grant you that their scent is quite charming."

"You are a tyrant, Aunt Elizabeth," Lettice cried with a gay laugh, "but I love you terribly."

She threw her arms impulsively around Elizabeth.

"There now," Elizabeth said stiffly as she disengaged herself. "How very demonstrative you are! You must learn to be more dignified at your age. You are over nineteen now, Lettice. You are a grown woman. You mustn't behave like a child."

Lettice threw back her head and laughed musically. She pinched her aunt's cheek, threw her cloak over her arm and skipped out of the room. In her green dress, she looked almost

as slender as Elizabeth. She was much taller, however, with a bust that had just assumed the voluptuous curves of blossoming womanhood. Going out of the door, she turned and blew a kiss. Her pale, bony face looked radiant and infinitely charming at that moment, with her full lips parted and her long golden lashes raised from her large blue eyes. Her eyes looked startled, as if she were having a vision of heavenly beauty.

Elizabeth's upper lip quivered as the door closed after her niece. She blinked and her brown eyes became tender almost to the point of tears.

"She is very beautiful," she said to herself. "May God protect her. This is no fit place for such a rare creature."

She glanced around the living-room with disapproval. It certainly looked shabby and gloomy on a day like this. The wainscoting was darkened by age. The carpet was worn to its threads here and there. The leather-covered sofa, the chairs, the turf fire on the hearth looked sordid in contrast with the radiant charm that the young girl had brought with her from Paris.

Elizabeth shuddered as she had done on hearing the shooting. Her eyes got hard. She pursed up her lips and went to a flower vase that lay on a small table near the window. She was growing afraid that her mode of life, which had been so static and peaceful for a great many years, was now confronted with violence and a destruction of intimate values.

While she was arranging the daffodils in the empty vase, the house servant came into the room with a large jug of water.

"Here is the water, Miss Elizabeth," the servant said.

"Did you hear the shooting, Annie?" said Elizabeth without looking at the servant.

Annie Fitzpatrick halted halfway across the floor on hearing this question. She was a stout and red-faced person of thirty-five, with flaxen hair that lay matted against her brick-red cheeks. She was perspiring freely from her work in the kitchen.

"God between us and harm," she said, "I didn't hear a sound in the kitchen."

She stood still for two or three seconds with her mouth wide open, like a person badly frightened. Yet her little blue eyes did not look at all afraid. On the contrary, they had a very cunning expression as they looked at Elizabeth. Then she approached her employer, walking on tip-toe and with her neck thrust forward, like a goose in hurried movement.

"Was it on the grounds of Manister House the shooting was?" she said in an awed whisper as she handed over the jug.

"It was," said Elizabeth.

"Glory be to God!" Annie said. "Then it was Captain Butcher they were after, God forgive them."

Elizabeth looked sharply at the woman.

"What do you mean, Annie?" she said in a low voice. "Did you hear something in the village?"

Annie put her cupped hands in front of her mouth and rolled her eyes upwards. It was the gesture of a person who is mortified at having unintentionally disclosed a secret.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" Elizabeth said severely. "Why don't you answer my question?"

Annie's face became hostile. She hid her hands behind her apron, stepped back two paces and assumed an arrogant pose.

"Arrah! What would I hear?" she cried in an insolent tone. "These are no times to be asking for that class of information, Miss Elizabeth."

Elizabeth closed her thin lips very tightly.

"I just asked you a civil question," she said.

Annie curtsied and said:

"Sorry, miss. I heard nothing at all in the village."

She had become humble again, just as suddenly as she had become arrogant.

"You may go," Elizabeth said haughtily.

She watched the servant go out of the room. Then she poured water on the flowers, went to the hearth and threw some sods of turf from a willow basket on to the fire. The fresh sods began to smoke almost at once. An acrid smell of peat pervaded the room. She brought a chair to the front of the fire and sat down. She began to brood on the peculiar intensity with which the serving woman had become hostile to her on being asked a simple question.

"How depressing it all is!" she said to herself bitterly. "Even though I have become a Catholic, Annie still looks on me as an enemy. It really is very depressing."

At that moment, a horrid sound came to her ears. It was the melancholy howl of a bloodhound. She got to her feet at once and looked towards the window with her lips parted.

"You see, Aunt," Lettice cried as she came bounding into the room, "that I have changed my shoes like an obedient child."

She closed the door, held up her skirts on either side and exposed her shoes for inspection. Finding that Elizabeth paid no heed to her, she dropped her skirts once more and hurried forward to the fireplace.

"Is there something the matter?" she said softly.

"It's that dog again," Elizabeth said. "I just heard him howl."

"I did hear howling as I came downstairs," Lettice said. "Does it upset you terribly?"

"It's that dreadful Cuban bloodhound belonging to Captain Butcher," said Elizabeth. "Last winter he nearly drove me insane. Ever since Lord Leitrim was murdered last April, Captain Butcher has been in deadly fear of his life. The curse has fallen on him. Night and day, he goes about with that slaving creature. He has . . ."

She interrupted herself, shuddered and sat down abruptly. Lettice glanced towards the window and frowned. Then she shrugged her shoulders, as if casting aside the evil influence of the brute. She smiled and crouched on the floor at her aunt's feet.

"It's only a dog," she whispered gently, caressing Elizabeth's knees with her arms. "One shouldn't allow oneself to be disturbed by such an ordinary creature."

"It's not the dog, but what it means," said Elizabeth, staring fixedly into the fire. "Captain Butcher, even though he is so bucolic and English, is just as nervous as the rest of us. The curse has fallen on him."

"What curse?" Lettice said.

Elizabeth looked at her niece intently.

"Did your father tell you nothing about the history of our family?" she said.

"Not very much," Lettice said. "In fact, he hardly ever mentioned Ireland until he suddenly announced that we were coming here. Then he told me quite a lot, but nothing at all about his ancestors. I always felt that . . ."

The dog began to howl once more. Elizabeth uttered an exclamation of terror and gripped Lettice by the shoulders. They both listened intently until the howling ended on a weird note of despair.

"It's really aggravating," Lettice said, becoming affected by her aunt's nervousness. "May I get you a glass of water?"

Before Elizabeth could answer, the door opened and her brother Raoul came into the room.

"What is the meaning of this infernal howling?" Raoul cried angrily as he shut the door behind him with violence. "I had just got over the depression caused by the beastly fog when . . ."

"Hush, Father," Lettice said gently. "Aunt Elizabeth is not feeling well."

Raoul looked from his daughter to his sister and back again. Then he made a gesture of hopelessness with his outstretched hands.

"It's all very primitive," he said. "I can't cope with it."

He was in his fifty-first year, but time had dealt far more leniently with him than with his sister. His appearance was remarkably youthful. There was hardly a trace of grey in his reddish hair and his face was without lines. He wore a small Vandyke beard, neatly trimmed. His features were handsome and showed breeding. His eyes were particularly attractive, light-blue in colour, mobile and intelligent. His nose was long and aquiline. He gave an impression of great haughtiness with his body held erect and tense, like an actor poised for the delivery of a choice speech. The oddity of his dress gave force to this impression of conceit. He wore a black velvet jacket, girdled by a cord of purple silk that hung far down his side, with thick tassels at the end. Black trousers and black patent-leather shoes, together with a soft white shirt that was open at the throat in poetic style, completed his costume.

He came over to his sister, took her hand and kissed it.

"Poor Lizzie!" he said. "It was very inconsiderate of me. I have lived too long apart from my own people. I've got into the habit of behaving like a boor as a result."

"I wish you wouldn't talk such nonsense, Raoul," Elizabeth said irritably.

She turned to Lettice and added:

"Would you please take that jug into the kitchen?"

Lettice took the jug from the table by the window and left the room.

"Did you hear the shooting, Raoul?" Elizabeth said when the door had closed behind her niece.

"Shooting?" Raoul said. "Why do you ask?"

"There was a good deal of firing in the direction of Manister House a little while ago," Elizabeth said.

"What of it?" Raoul said. "Surely, that's nothing odd. I've heard almost enough gunfire to suggest a major battle from that direction every day since my return. Our unspeakable neighbour evidently worships firearms."

"I'm afraid there has been an attempt on his life," said Elizabeth, peering upwards at her brother.

"On Captain Butcher's life?" said Raoul, becoming interested. "What makes you think that?"

"I've been expecting it for some time," Elizabeth said. "A remark that Annie let drop a few minutes ago convinces me. . . ."

"Very interesting," Raoul interrupted excitedly.

"Raoul, I'm very worried," Elizabeth continued, raising her voice a little. "The whole county is on the verge of revolt. The

people are afraid that there is going to be another famine. They are in an ugly mood."

"You think so?" Raoul said, caressing his beard gently with the tips of his fingers.

He looked out the window with his head a little to one side. There was a brooding look in his eyes for a few moments. Then he laughed suddenly, showing a perfect set of little white teeth. His face looked boyish and irresponsible when he laughed.

"Why must you always be so frivolous, Raoul?" said Elizabeth irritably.

"I don't feel in the least frivolous, Lizzie," Raoul said as he began to pace the floor with his hands behind his back. "It's just that the sound of certain words intensely affects me. Revolt, for instance, strikes me as being comic. It has a peculiarly frustrated sound, and frustration, of course, is the basis of all clowning."

"You have a very peculiar sense of humour," Elizabeth said, "but it's not going to be very amusing if there is a revolt of the peasants."

"You think not?" said Raoul. "I grant you that it's not going to be very amusing for the landlords. For us, though, it might be quite amusing. It would certainly be very amusing to see how our loathsome neighbour dealt with the situation."

"You don't seem to realize," Elizabeth said, "that the people hate us just as violently as they hate Captain Butcher, Lord Mongooole, Miss Piggott and the rest."

"Nonsense," said Raoul.

"I assure you that it's not," Elizabeth said heatedly. "A few minutes ago, the servant turned on me savagely when I asked her a simple question. I could see in her eyes that she hated me bitterly at that moment. It was nothing personal; of that I feel sure. However, it was something far worse than a personal hatred. One can deal with that, but not with a blind and stupid resentment of one's class and of one's breeding."

"I repeat that it's nonsense," Raoul said imperturbably. "We are *déclassés*, my dear Lizzie. The people may despise us, as they probably do, but they don't hate us. Only the strong are ever hated. Our people came here at the end of the twelfth century. They were Norman adventurers that settled in the country by force, appropriated the land and assumed the privileges of feudal lords. In those days there was nothing criminal about being a feudal lord. It was the best means that the human species had, in this part of the world at least, for maintaining order. Our ancestors, on the whole, were good feudal lords. They owned a barony of land. They built Killuragh Castle. They built the town

of Clash and developed a very important commerce with the Spanish Empire. They were the first people in Ireland, according to the records, to introduce the wearing of silk underwear and the waxing of the moustaches . . .”

“Stop it, Raoul,” Elizabeth interrupted, just as Lettice entered the room on tip-toe. “Your daughter is present. She is now old enough to be misguided by a frivolous attitude towards life on your part.”

Raoul halted and put his hands to his ears. He twisted his features into an expression of acute pain.

“Again you use that ridiculous word,” he said. “It grates on my ears.”

“Is there something the matter, Lettice?” Elizabeth said.

Lettice appeared to have been frightened. She had closed the door after her so gently that it made no sound at all. She was moving over to the window when her aunt addressed her. She turned towards Elizabeth and smiled with an effort. Her face did not now look radiant when she smiled. There were vertical lines between her eyes.

“There is nothing the matter, Aunt,” she said in a tone of forced gaiety.

“Are you sure you didn’t catch cold gathering those flowers?” said Elizabeth.

“Not in the least,” Lettice said.

She went over to the vase of flowers and began to rearrange them, with her back to her aunt.

“On the whole,” Raoul said, with one hand under his armpit and the other hand caressing his beard, “I feel rather pleased with my ancestors, come to think of it.”

He had stood motionless for a little while, staring at the floor. Now he shrugged his shoulders, put his hands behind his back and walked the length of the floor, back and forth, rapidly.

“They were remarkably clever,” he said. “Otherwise, they could not have maintained their property intact until the eighteenth century. It was quite a feat, you know, subtly changing their religious and political beliefs with every shift of history. Then, of course, the process of decay that is the fate of all ruling classes caught up with them. They had to make way for their successors, the English merchants and manufacturers. Lord Mongoole took possession of Killuragh Castle and the township of Clash. Grandfather was left with Manister House and three thousand acres of mountain land, inhabited by miserable cottiers whom he was forced to bleed mercilessly in order to survive. That was, of course, feudalism gone to seed. The institution had

become criminal and was ready for its overthrow. Why blame our ancestors for being human? Father was the most exacting of them all, until the famine came and made it impossible for his tenants to pay anything at all. Then the bank foreclosed on the mortgage. Manister House became the property of Captain Butcher. The St. George family, after six hundred and fifty years of power, ceased to be Irish landlords. Their cycle was completed. They returned to the bosom of the earth."

He halted, put his left hand under his armpit and caressed the tip of his head.

"It's rather beautiful," he said dreamily, looking towards the ceiling. "If there is really such a thing as the poetry of history, this must be an example of it. Here we are, the three of us, in this little house. We still bear a name that was hated and feared in this district for many centuries. Now we are despised and ignored. Our importance is no more than that of this decaying house in which we live. When we die, our name . . ."

He was interrupted by a wild tumult from out of doors. There was angry shouting, the clatter of horses in movement and the savage yelping of a bloodhound, which somebody was trying to restrain in a shrill voice.

"Confound it!" cried Raoul angrily. "This is becoming unbearable."

The tumult increased. Finally, there was a violent knocking at the hall door. Then a man cleared his throat and shouted arrogantly.

"Is there anybody at home?" the man said.

"Thank God!" said Elizabeth. "At least he is not dead. That's Captain Butcher, Raoul. You had better deal with him."

"I certainly shall," said Raoul as he moved to the door.

"Father, you mustn't let him come into the house," Lettice cried nervously.

Raoul paused with his hand on the door knob and glanced at his daughter over his shoulder.

"For what reason, pray?" he said.

Lettice took a pace forward and put her fingers to a medallion that was suspended from her neck by a silver chain.

"Please, don't allow him to enter," she said in a lower tone.

"Stop being hysterical, Lettice," Raoul said.

He passed out into the hall, closing the door after him violently. He was now very angry with everybody. He got still more angry on catching sight of Annie Fitzpatrick as he moved along the hall. The kitchen door stood ajar and she was peeping at him from around its corner. Her mouth was wide open and the finger-tips

of her left hand were pressed down against the teeth of her lower jaw.

"Get back into your kitchen," Raoul ordered her.

Then he threw open the hall door and stared into the face of Captain Butcher.

"What do you mean by making such an infernal noise?" he cried.

Captain Butcher took off his hat and said rudely:

"The compliments of Captain Butcher."

"Compliments!" said Raoul. "Indeed! Most extraordinary way to present them. Well?"

Captain Butcher shifted his left foot a little to the rear of his right, as if he were going to bow. Instead of bowing, however, he threw out his chest and raised his chin in a hostile manner.

"Mr. St. George, I presume?" he cried arrogantly.

He was a man of fifty-five, powerfully built and well over six feet in height. His hands and feet were uncommonly large. His jaws protruded and their shape gave the impression that the centre of his face was abnormally hollow. Otherwise, he was well-proportioned and handsome in a brutal sort of way. He appeared to be still in his prime. His small grey eyes, deeply set in his skull like those of a boxer, looked straight ahead with a fixed stare. Hatless, he showed a broad forehead on which there were beads of perspiration. His forehead looked very white in contrast with the dark red colour of his cheeks. His crown was practically bald, except for long strands of hair that were combed across it. He was dressed in brown top boots, cord breeches and a heavy tweed jacket that came halfway down his thighs. The jacket was unbuttoned, showing a vest of chain mail beneath. His hat was also composed of metal, over which dark cloth had been stretched. He carried a revolver in a belt at his waist. He had another revolver in his right hand.

"I am St. George," Raoul said. "May I know why you called?"

He was now smiling broadly, his sense of humour having been intrigued by Butcher's odd costume.

"There has been an attempt on my life," Butcher answered.

"The culprit made his escape on to your property. In fact, he must be in your house."

"What makes you think so?" said Raoul.

"My dog tracked him across the river on to your land," Butcher said. "Then he . . ."

He was interrupted by the appearance of a small man with bowed legs and a weazened face, obviously a retired jockey. The little fellow came round the gable of the house from the direction

of the kitchen. He was dragging the bloodhound after him on a heavy chain.

"Where the devil are you going, Fleming?" Butcher shouted at the little fellow.

"The kitchen door is locked," Fleming said, trying to hold the dog and tip his hat to his employer at the same time. "They won't answer us."

A tall man carrying a fowling piece also appeared.

"It's locked, sir," the tall man said. "We can't get a word out of them."

"Damnation!" Butcher shouted. "Get back to the kitchen door, both of you. Stay there. Fire if he attempts to break, Hopkins. I'm entering by the front, now that the proprietor is here to open the door."

"Very good, sir," Hopkins replied.

He hurried round the gable at a brisk trot, followed by Fleming and the dog.

"Now, sir," Butcher continued, turning once more to Raoul, "kindly allow me to search your premises."

Raoul had ceased to be amused. He was annoyed by the appearance of the servants and the freedom they were taking with his property. He had noticed a third servant some way down the drive. This third man was sitting a chestnut horse, while he held a grey horse by the head. What annoyed Raoul most of all was the use of the word "premises" to describe his house.

"Tell your servants to get off my grounds at once, Captain Butcher," he said quietly.

"Are you insane, sir?" Butcher cried in a loud voice.

"I find their presence and your insolence intolerable," Raoul said with great deliberation. "I insist on their leaving at once, with the horses and that brute of a dog."

"Have I made it clear that there has been an attempt on my life?" Butcher shouted.

"What of it?" said Raoul. "You look large enough and sufficiently well armed to deal with any attack on your life, which I feel to be of somewhat doubtful value, judging by your manners."

"I warn you, sir . . ." Butcher began.

"Ah! I see," Raoul interrupted. "You are now issuing threats, armed with a drawn pistol and accompanied by a dangerous animal. Really, my dear Captain . . ."

"I know when I am within my rights," Butcher shouted. "I am a justice of the peace."

"I happen to be a barrister-at-law," Raoul retorted. "I venture

to suggest that your knowledge of what the law allows is very rudimentary."

"Do you refuse to let me search your premises?" cried Butcher.

"Get your servants off my grounds and put away that weapon," Raoul said, "and stop behaving like a boor."

Butcher stared at Raoul in silence for several moments. There was deep hatred in his little grey eyes. Then he bit his lower lip and called to his servants.

"Murphy, take the horses off these grounds," he cried. "You, Fleming, take the dog away. You, too, Hopkins. Look sharp, all of you."

The bloodhound made a great commotion when Fleming was taking him away from the house. A mass of froth trickled from his jaws to the ground while he howled and strained at the leash.

"Do you make a practice of calling on your neighbours with this savage animal, Captain Butcher?" Raoul said.

Butcher thrust his revolver into the pocket of his jacket and cried: "Damn it, sir, do you see this?"

He drew the left side of his jacket across his metal vest. There was a small hole in the brown cloth, above the region of the heart.

"You see?" he continued in an injured tone. "I would have been shot through the heart, were it not for my vest. As it was, I was thrown from my horse and knocked unconscious for a few minutes. Otherwise I would have caught the ruffian. My servants waited to give me aid instead of pursuing him at once. Damn fools! They lost their heads. I had given them express orders, in case such a situation arose, to pursue the assassin, irrespective of my condition. Too many gentlemen show cowardice, in my opinion, by failing to order their body-servants to pursue the assassin, when a bullet finds its mark on their person. My idea is . . ."

"I'm not interested in your ideas particularly, Captain Butcher," Raoul interrupted. "If you insist on searching my house, I implore you to hurry. It's coming near my meal-time and my cook is easily upset. I'm afraid she is already somewhat upset by the howling of your dog and by all the noise you have made."

Captain Butcher suddenly lost the exuberant energy of his rage. He now looked like a man struggling to retain control of himself in spite of acute pain.

"I just want to look around your kitchen," he muttered, "and ask your servant a few questions. The fellow undoubtedly crossed the river on to your property. He's not in any of the out-houses and there is nowhere else . . ."

"I must ask you to lower your voice," Raoul said as they went along the hall towards the kitchen. "My sister is in the living-room and she has been very much upset by your dog."

Butcher's cheeks had paled owing to the severe pain he was enduring. They reddened once more in anger at Raoul's contemptuous tone. He doubled his fists.

"You swine!" he muttered under his breath. "You are going to pay for every word in due course."

The kitchen was full of smoke. It was difficult to breathe there, or to see anything clearly. The chimney was not drawing properly, a usual occurrence when there was a heavy mist. The smoke kept billowing out at irregular intervals from the enormous turf fire. Several pots and kettles of water were boiling on the hobs at either side of the grate. They added clouds of steam to the acrid-smelling peat smoke. A still further cloud of smoke came from a large cauldron that was suspended by iron hooks from the chimney frame.

Annie Fitzpatrick stood at one side of a long table with a knife in her hand. She had been peeling potatoes. She began to tremble as Butcher walked over to her. His heavy field boots made a hollow sound on the flagstones of the floor.

"Did anybody come in here just now?" he said.

Instead of making a reply, Annie dropped the knife on to the table hurriedly, wiped her hands on her apron and ran to a corner of the room. She sat down abruptly on the settle-bed. This was a long deal chest, with a raised back and arms like a sofa. It was an article of furniture common at that time in country houses, being used as a bed during the night and a settle during the day. There was a rude curtain folded at one end.

"Why don't you answer the gentleman?" said Raoul. "You mustn't make a bad impression on a visitor."

"I'm terrified of the dog, sir," Annie said. "He has the life frightened out of me. I'm not worth a red farthing after the fright he gave me."

Raoul noticed that she was wearing a man's cloth cap. Never having seen her wear such an article of dress during his month's stay in the house, even though he made daily visits to the kitchen in an effort to improve her cooking, he felt sure that she was concealing something important from Captain Butcher. He felt gay as a result.

"Come now," he said in a bantering tone, "you have no reason to feel alarmed. I have had the dog sent away. You mustn't lose control of yourself, Annie, simply because a gentleman with so much charm as Captain Butcher condescends to pay us a visit.

Answer his questions. Otherwise he may suspect that I'm in the habit of beating you."

Encouraged by his bantering tone and by a furtive wink, Annie got to her feet and curtsied to Captain Butcher.

"Your honour," she said, "I'd answer your question and welcome, only I've clean forgotten what it was in the first place. I'm all moidhered on account of the way you were shouting and the terrible barking of that heathen dog."

"Did anybody come into the kitchen just now?" Butcher said.

"Miss Lettice came in with a jug," Annie replied.

"Anybody else?" said Butcher.

"Who else would come in, sir?" she said quickly. "The labouring man is gone to Clash with the cart, to buy meal for the pigs. Miss Elizabeth never comes into the kitchen. Saving your presence, sir, the smell of cooking disagrees with her. I had the place to myself until Mr. Raoul came back from France with Miss Lettice. He does be coming nearly every day to show me the French way of doing things. He didn't come in to-day, and there is a reason for that. There's a lamb stew to-day and his honour told me himself that I make it better than any French person."

"Quite true," Raoul said to Captain Butcher. "She makes a really delicious stew. Are you interested in cooking, Captain? Alas! It's a lost art in our country nowadays."

Butcher glared at Raoul and walked over to the settle bed. He touched it with his boot.

"What's in here?" he said.

"That's the labouring man's bed, sir," Annie said eagerly. "There's his mattress and his blankets and his bundle inside in it. Would your honour care to have a look?"

She raised the lid of the settle bed, exposing a sordid mattress and torn woollen blankets, from which an unpleasant odour of stale sweat issued. Butcher made a movement as if he were going to bend down and examine the interior. Instead, he made a grimace of disgust and turned away with an angry shrug of his shoulders.

"Why did you lock the door?" he said.

Annie closed the lid with an expression of relief on her face. Then she turned towards Butcher in quite a belligerent attitude.

"Arrah! Why wouldn't I lock it?" she cried savagely. "Wasn't your dog frightening the life out of me? Have the poor no rights at all? Lord save us, did you want me to stand here unprotected, with the door wide open, so that he could rush in and tear the immortal soul out of my body? Pruth! Is it coming to that? Must

the poor let themselves be torn by wild animals, without turning a key in a lock to defend themselves?"

Butcher stared at her in silence for nearly a minute. He quite obviously did not believe a word of what she had said. Yet he took no further action. Instead, he turned on his heel and strode out of the kitchen. His face now looked terribly drawn and pale, as if he were on the point of collapse.

"Get on with your work, Annie," Raoul said.

Annie dropped on to the settle bed, opened her mouth wide and let her arms hang limply by her sides.

"You're not going, are you?" Raoul said cheerfully as he followed Butcher along the hall towards the door. "Why not search the whole house? It's not very large. It wouldn't take long. I rather enjoy hunting for an assassin in my own house."

Butcher halted by the door and glared savagely at Raoul. He now had his hands pressed against his sides and he was breathing irregularly.

"Mr. St. George," he said, "allow me to warn you that I am a very vindictive person. I have an idea that you may shortly regret your insolence."

"I wonder!" said Raoul. "You don't impress me as being a very dangerous enemy. On the other hand, your boorish manners make me inclined to . . ."

"You'll rue the day you left France," Butcher interrupted, gasping for breath.

"Frankly," said Raoul, "I did regret leaving France until this moment. Now I think I'm going to enjoy living in County Mayo very much."

Butcher strode out of the house, leaving the door open behind him.

"Murphy," he called to his groom as he strode down the drive, "fetch my horse."

"Coming, sir," cried the groom from a distance. "Twous! Gee up there, Blazer."

There was a sudden clatter of hooves and then the irregular rhythm of two horses trotting side by side. Butcher disappeared round a corner of the drive. His great boots, striking the gravel with their metal-tipped heels, made almost as much noise as the horses.

Raoul walked out on to the drive for a few yards and then halted. He rubbed his palms together and smiled.

"I intensely dislike that man," he said in a passionate undertone. "He has grossly insulted me. Very well! I am going to destroy him."

He sighed, turned around and re-entered the house. Having closed the door, he found himself face to face with Elizabeth in the hall.

"Oh! Raoul," she cried, "what have you done?"

She stood wringing her hands. Lettice was standing behind her.

"Damnation!" Raoul said.

"You have quarrelled with that man," Elizabeth continued, "in spite of my imploring you not to do so. You have seized the very first opportunity to insult him."

"Surely, my dear Lizzie," said Raoul, "you couldn't expect me to let that common knave's insolence go unchallenged."

"I know he is difficult and unpleasant," Elizabeth said, "but you should have ignored his rudeness for your daughter's sake. Now every house in the county is going to be closed against her. Captain Butcher is all-powerful these days. His word is law. We are going to be outcasts, just at a moment when Lettice . . ."

"Silence!" cried Raoul in a fury. "Do you think I could allow my daughter's happiness to depend on that bounder's favour?"

At that moment, they heard a cry of dismay come from the direction of the kitchen. They all looked and saw Annie Fitzpatrick running towards them. She was in a state of extreme agitation. She was still wearing the man's cap that had aroused Raoul's interest. On reaching the little group, she halted abruptly and put her palms against her large bosom.

"God forgive me," she gasped, "I'm afraid I've smothered him."

She threw out her arms and made a mumbling sound, like a person about to fall in a fit. Elizabeth and Lettice took hold of her, one on either side. That did not seem to help. On the contrary, she began to tremble violently on being touched. Then Raoul struck her a sharp blow on the cheek with the back of his hand.

"Control yourself," he said harshly, "and tell me what has happened."

"Raoul," said Elizabeth, "you are disgusting. How could you be so cruel as to . . .?"

"Quiet, all of you," said Raoul. "Don't you see the woman has hysterics? You'll drive me insane with your babbling. Speak up, Annie. What is the matter?"

The blow gradually brought the servant to her proper senses. She grew calm enough to speak coherently after another few seconds.

"I hid him in the settle-bed," she said, "when I heard the Captain coming with his men. I put the clothes over him, for fear

he'd be seen by anyone that opened up the settle. The clothes must have smothered him. He's there now without a word or a move out of him, although I called him by name and shook him. He's as dead as a door nail, God forgive me."

"Good Lord!" said Elizabeth.

"How stupid of me!" said Raoul, hurrying towards the kitchen door. "I thought he had escaped when I saw you wearing his cap."

Entering the kitchen, he saw that the lid of the settle-bed was again raised. The mattress and the blankets were scattered on the floor. On approaching the chest, he saw a man lying face upwards in its deep interior. There was a bloody cloth bound across the skull. One cheek was matted with blood. The rest of the face was deadly pale.

"Looks dead," Raoul muttered. "What a ridiculous situation!"

He took the man's wrist and felt the pulse. It was still beating faintly.

"Give me a hand," he called out excitedly. "The fellow is not dead yet. He is merely unconscious. Fetch the brandy. Throw open the window and door. It's stifling in here."

He got his hands under the man's armpits and managed to raise the limp body to a sitting posture by the time Annie and Elizabeth had reached him. Lettice had already run to fetch the brandy.

"Take his legs, Annie," Raoul said. "Don't be afraid. It's not a corpse. Lucky thing for us all that it's not a corpse. Nice kettle of fish it would be trying to explain the presence of a corpse under these circumstances. I loathe corpses. Heave now, Annie. Come on, woman. Don't blubber. You got him in here. Now help to get him out."

It was quite difficult getting the man out of the chest, owing to its narrow depth. Both Raoul and Annie were panting loudly by the time they had laid him on the table, which Elizabeth had cleared in the meantime.

"Phew!" said Raoul, drawing the back of his hand across his forehead. "I thought I asked somebody to open the window. It's stifling here. Open that wretched window, Annie."

"What's the good of trying to open it, your honour?" Annie said. "Sure you know well it's only an ornament. It's built into the wall and it doesn't open at all."

"What's that?" said Raoul. "You mean to say the window doesn't open?"

Annie unbolted the door, threw it open and let a draught of fresh air into the smoky room. Then they set to work, trying to

revive the unconscious man. At this point, it was the frail and nervous Elizabeth that proved to be the most efficient. She took charge of the operation.

"If you keep silent for a few seconds," she said to Raoul, "we may succeed in getting something done."

Raoul shrugged his shoulders, walked over to the fire and put his hands to the heat.

"Very well!" he said. "How I hate confusion or disorder of any sort!"

Lettice came with the brandy. Elizabeth poured some of it into the man's mouth. Then she removed the bloody cloth. There was a long gash across the right side of the skull above the temple. She peered at it closely, bending down over the table.

"It's just a scratch, really," she said, "in spite of all the blood. No skull fracture, obviously. Probably a fall. That's nothing serious."

"He was like a man walking in his sleep when he came into the kitchen, Miss Elizabeth," Annie said. "He didn't know where he was. He frightened the life out of me, but sure worse was to happen."

Elizabeth glared at Annie and said:

"It was most disloyal of you to conceal his presence."

"Arrah! What else could I do?" Annie cried arrogantly.

"Come now," said Raoul. "No silly bickering, please. Get this fellow on his feet as quickly as possible. Ha! He's coming back to life. That's most fortunate. I have a horror of corpses, even under the most convenient circumstances."

The man had moved both his hands and his feet. Then he turned his head to one side and shuddered gently.

"Get some warm water, Annie," Elizabeth said. "We must wash this cut thoroughly. I'm going to fetch ointment and bandages. It needs a proper dressing."

"You needn't bother, Miss Elizabeth," Annie said gruffly. "I put a scraped potato on it and it's well known that a scraped potato is the best cure for a cut. Sure, the bleeding is stopped already and it will cure itself now with the help of God."

Elizabeth glanced with disapproval at the particles of mashed potato that clung to the outer edges of the cut. Then she glared once more at the servant.

"Get some warm water," she said as she walked out of the room, "and wash the cut thoroughly. Be quick about it."

Annie wagged her head from side to side quickly, like a boxer dodging repeated jabs of an opponent's fists, as she watched Elizabeth go out of the kitchen. Then she took a small dish and

poured hot water into it from one of the kettles. She took a clean cloth and approached the table with obvious reluctance, muttering under her breath. Finally, she put the dish on the table, put her hands on her hips and turned to Raoul angrily.

"Everybody knows that a scraped potato is best for a cut," she cried in an arrogant tone.

"I refuse to take sides in your dispute with my sister," Raoul said quietly. "Attend to the injured man, like a good woman."

"Let me do it, Annie," Lettice said.

She went to the table and moistened the cloth in the warm water.

"That's much better," Raoul said. "You carry on with your cooking, Annie. I have a horrible feeling that the stew is going to be ruined as a result of all this."

"Arrah! How could I cook with a man lying there and he waiting for the gates of Heaven to open?" Annie cried indignantly.

Lettice began to wash the cut delicately. The man shuddered as he felt the warm water on his head. Then he opened his eyes slowly and looked at Lettice. She dropped the cloth at once into the dish and drew back a little. They stared at one another for a few moments. They both looked startled. Then Lettice made a move to pick up the cloth once more. The man got frightened by her movement. He rose to a sitting position and swung his legs off the table.

"Lie down there, in God's name," Annie said, rushing towards him.

She caught him by the arms and tried to force him back to a reclining position. He brushed her aside.

"Don't interfere with him," Raoul said to the servant.

The man got to his feet and looked around the room. He stood with his legs far apart, his arms limp by his sides, swaying slowly back and forth.

"Where am I?" he muttered.

His name was Michael O'Dwyer. He was twenty-seven years old, six feet in height, with a rugged and deeply bronzed face, jet-black hair and blue eyes of great intensity. There was a suggestion of extraordinary power in his lean and muscular body, even now that he was dazed. He was dressed like a seaman in black top boots, oilskin trousers and a heavy blue woollen jersey.

"Sit down quietly," Raoul said to him in a casual tone, "and allow us to wash that cut on your head. You are among friends. You needn't be at all nervous. Do you understand?"

O'Dwyer stared at Raoul in silence for a little while. His face rapidly lost its dazed expression. He suddenly smiled.

"Thank you, sir," he said to Raoul.

Raoul directed him to a chair that stood by the wall. He had just sat down when Elizabeth returned to the room with the bandages and ointment.

"Good gracious!" she said on catching sight of O'Dwyer.

Seeing that she was hostile to him, O'Dwyer jumped to his feet.

"Please don't be disturbed," Raoul said, touching the young man on the arm. "My sister is not going to hurt you in any way. She is just going to put some bandages and dressing on your cut. I assure you that you are among friends. Don't be nervous."

O'Dwyer looked at Raoul and smiled again. Then he nodded his head and resumed his seat. Even so, he glanced suspiciously at Elizabeth several times while she was dressing the cut.

"There now," Elizabeth said, taking a pace to her rear briskly after she had finished. "That should suffice."

She looked at O'Dwyer with an expression of disgust on her face.

"I have done my duty as a Catholic," she said in a shrill tone, "but don't get the idea that I approve of your conduct. On the contrary, I have the most profound loathing for your behaviour."

Then she marched stiffly towards the door.

"Come along, Lettice," she said before passing out of the room.

Lettice obeyed her aunt at once, but she halted before reaching the door. She looked towards O'Dwyer, flushed and then curtsied.

"I hope you recover soon," she said gently. "Good day."

O'Dwyer stared after her with his lips parted. He started when Raoul spoke to him, so deep was his concentration on the girl who had just left.

"Have some brandy?" Raoul said, coming over to the chair with the bottle. "Another nip will just about do the trick."

O'Dwyer drank a good deal of the brandy. Then he jumped to his feet briskly.

"I feel fine now," he said to Raoul as he returned the bottle. "I'm very grateful to you."

Raoul made a grimace of disgust.

"I wish you wouldn't use that word," he said. "I find gratitude the most repulsive of human emotions."

O'Dwyer looked at Raoul in amazement. Then he laughed.

"I must go," he said. "Where is my cap?"

"I'll find it for you," Annie said.

She began to fuss around the room, looking for the cap. Raoul laughed. Annie looked at him and grumbled under her breath.

"This is a queer time to be making fun of people," she said.

"But you're wearing the cap, you fool," Raoul said.

"Mother of God!" Annie said, putting her hand to her head. "What brought it there?"

"Lucky thing for us all," Raoul said, "that Butcher was in a vile temper. Otherwise he would have smelt a rat."

"Bloody woe!" Annie said. "If he had seen the cap on my head, I'd be hung."

O'Dwyer fixed the cap carefully over his bandaged skull and then pulled a revolver from his pocket.

"Goodbye now, sir," he said, stretching out his hand towards Raoul. "I won't thank you, since you . . ."

"Excellent!" said Raoul, clasping the outstretched hand. "It has been a great pleasure to make your acquaintance. I'd like to see more of you, if I may. There are many things I could tell you, many useful things. Come and visit me when you get an opportunity."

"I'll do that, sir," said O'Dwyer. "I'll come as soon as I can."

Then he shook hands with Annie and said with deep feeling:

"May God reward you for your kindness."

Annie made the sign of the Cross in front of his face and said:

"May God go with you, treasure."

O'Dwyer darted out of the house with the revolver in his hand. He had disappeared into the mist within a few seconds. Annie locked the door and put her back to it. She let her head loll to one side.

"What an extraordinary man!" Raoul said, staring at the ceiling and fingering the tip of his beard. "Really unusual!"

"Lord save us!" Annie said. "'Twill take me years to recover from this ferocious day."

Raoul folded his arms on his chest and looked at the floor.

"Could it be destiny?" he said.

"What's that, sir?" Annie said.

Raoul looked vaguely at the servant, put his hands in the pockets of his velvet jacket and walked out of the room.

"Could I have a word with you, Raoul?" Elizabeth said to him as he was going along the hall.

She was standing in the doorway of the living-room. Raoul looked at her vaguely as he passed, but he did not reply to her question. He went to the hall stand and took a black cloak from a peg.

"Did you hear me, Raoul?" Elizabeth said, coming over to him.

Raoul threw the cloak about his shoulders, posed before the

little mirror that surmounted the stand and began to make foppish bow at his throat with the cloak ribbons.

"I heard you, Lizzie," he said at length in a casual tone.

"Then why don't you have the politeness to answer me?" Elizabeth said.

"First of all," said Raoul, "I'm not at all polite. Secondly, I know very well what you are going to say and I want to avoid the necessity of scolding you. I've got excited. Excitement of any sort plays havoc with my digestion. I beg of you, Lizzie, not to argue with me at this moment. I'm going for a little walk, in order to compose myself before sitting down to table."

Elizabeth came close to him and said in a tense whisper:

"I must know what you are going to do with that man."

"You needn't worry about that," said Raoul as he took a black hat from a peg. "The man is gone about his business, whatever that may be. An astounding fellow. At one moment he was lying unconscious on the table. At the next, practically speaking, he was bounding away into the mist with the speed of a greyhound. I'd give a great deal to possess his strength and his energy. It's really remarkable."

"Do you mean to say that you have let him go?" said Elizabeth.

Raoul put on his hat, picked up a silver-mounted cane, threw back a corner of his cloak jauntily over his left shoulder and then turned towards his sister. He now looked rather like an actor in a melodrama.

"What did you expect me to do?" he said coldly. "Turn him over to the police? I've been here a month now. During that time, I've tried to let you know as gently as possible what my attitude towards society is going to be, here in County Mayo. Now you force me to be more definite. I regret that very much, because I really dislike being brutal to women. I inherited this property from my father. So I am master here. I intend to be master, in the full meaning of the word. I don't want any sort of interference with my authority, either on your part or on the part of anybody else. During the past twenty odd years, you have been kind enough to live here. You looked after my mother during her last years. You also tended my brother Julian during his protracted illness. For that I am indebted to you, without being in the least conscience-stricken for not having done it myself. My feeling of indebtedness towards you is not going to influence my conduct in the least, in so far as the exercise of my authority is concerned. You wrote and asked me to return from France after Julian's death last January. Otherwise, I probably would never have come back. Now that I am back I propose to behave

exactly as I behaved abroad. I am what is called nowadays a free-thinker, for lack of a more fitting definition. That means that I adopt a purely personal attitude towards ideas and the phenomena of life. Dear Lizzie, don't force me to be brutal by trying to interfere with my conduct in any way. You know how cruel and uncompromising men of our family can be, when they feel that their authority is being flouted."

He raised his hat, bowed, went to the hall door and opened it. "May God forgive you," Elizabeth said fervently as he was going out the door.

Raoul looked back at her, raised his hat once more and bowed.

"Thank you," he said, as he closed the door after him very gently.

Lettice came along the hall as Elizabeth was returning to the living-room. They looked at one another in silence as they passed. Then Lettice ran upstairs.

Elizabeth went into the living-room, closed the door, picked up her skirts and walked with great dignity to her desk in the far corner. She folded her little shawl neatly and draped it over the back of her chair. She sat down, took up her quill pen and bent low over the sheet of paper she had been reading when disturbed by the first reports of gunfire. The quill pen began to touch each word lightly as she read.

She suddenly dropped the pen on to the paper, put her elbows on the edge of the desk, covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

CHAPTER II

DISTRICT INSPECTOR JAMES FENTON, of the Royal Irish Constabulary, arrived in Manister at three o'clock in the afternoon to investigate the attack on Captain Butcher. He brought a force of twenty men, including Head Constable Reilly and his clerk, from the district headquarters at Clash. The party came on five jaunting cars. The horses were all flecked with foam when they halted outside the police barracks in the village square. They had galloped the whole distance of four miles.

The village looked beautiful in the brilliant sunshine to which the morning mist had given place. It faced the ocean above a beach of yellow sand. It was built around a square, along a gentle slope that stretched from the beach-head to the ivied wall of Captain Butcher's demesne. The houses were all gaily painted in

maroon, orange, red and yellow colours. Steep granite cliffs that jutted far out to sea on the north and a flat peninsula to the south made a snug harbour. There was a stone pier. The white tower of a lighthouse stood on a high rock at the far end of the peninsula.

Sergeant Geraghty, commander of the local police garrison, stood outside the door of his barracks to greet the district inspector. A group of the principal inhabitants accompanied him. Other groups of people, most of them being women and children, watched the proceedings from remote corners of the square. The majority of the village men had gone into hiding, fearful of being questioned about the ambush.

"Good day, sir," Geraghty said, saluting smartly as his superior dismounted.

"Well! Geraghty," Fenton said, "you've been having a little trouble."

"I'm afraid so, sir," Geraghty said.

Fenton set his legs wide apart, leaned forward slightly from his hips and nodded briefly in the direction of the other people that were gathered there. He was a tall, handsome Englishman of thirty-six. He belonged to the lesser gentry of his country, like most officers of the Constabulary at that period. He looked quite a dandy in the tight-fitting, dark-green uniform of his corps. His hair and complexion were very fair. His features were well shaped and firm. He bore the arrogant and almost contemptuous expression that seems to be inseparable from a police official. His blue eyes, however, looked troubled behind the mask of arrogance.

Father Cornelius Costigan, the parish priest, stepped forward and saluted. He was a tall and powerfully built man of sixty-two, with curly grey hair and white eyebrows. A high silk hat was perched rakishly on the side of his large skull. Leaning his hip against a heavy walking stick, he addressed Fenton in a tone of solemn dignity.

"Mr. Fenton," he said, as loudly as if he were addressing an enormous throng, "I want to apologise, in the name of my parish, for the outrage committed this morning on Captain Butcher, by a person or persons unknown."

Fenton nodded. He felt annoyed by the loud tone in which Father Costigan had spoken. He considered it insulting.

"I appreciate your expression of loyalty, Father Costigan," he said, deliberately raising his own voice a little, just as when talking to a servant. "I feel sure that your feelings are shared, as you say, by the vast majority of your parishioners."

Father Costigan bowed and said:

"Thank you, Mr. Fenton. I confidently hope that no hasty

action on the part of the police, arising from this isolated act of revolutionary folly, will cause my people to change their attitude of obedience to constituted authority."

He raised his hat, bowed once more, turned sharply and walked away. His abrupt and almost unfriendly departure explained why he had spoken so loudly. He wanted to make himself heard by all the people in the square. In this way, he let his parishioners understand that he profoundly disapproved of the ambush. At the same time, his cold and formal attitude towards the district inspector and his abrupt departure, after issuing a warning against reprisals of any sort, saved him from suspicion of being a collaborator with the foreign government.

Fenton tipped his helmet angrily with his rolled gloves in answer to the priest's parting salute. He realised that he had been outclassed in the diplomatic exchange. Then he turned to greet the doctor, who had stepped forward to pay his respects.

"Too bad about this attack on Captain Butcher," Dr. McCarthy said. "It's a miracle that the man escaped with his life. Even so, two ribs broken, along with a heavy fall from his horse, is no joke for a man of his age."

"Just two ribs?" Fenton said as he looked down patronisingly at the little doctor.

McCarthy was very short and fat. Small blue eyes, sunk behind bulging red cheeks, gave him the appropriate nickname of "Piggy." Although not yet turned forty, he was almost completely bald.

"That was all the damage done, thank God," he said, "but sure it's more than enough for a man of his age, as I said before. He was saved by his steel vest. Otherwise, the poor man would be laid out now, ready for skinning. He is a hard man, all right. When I saw him first, I thought it was apoplexy. He was redder in the face than a boiled lobster and he could hardly breathe. It was more shock than the broken ribs that ailed him. I took him up to Manister House in my trap. It's no joke getting a big bullet smack against the heart and then being thrown from the back of a tall hunter that's trotting at the time."

Frank McMahon, proprietor of the village hotel, touched his cap and addressed Fenton. He was a lean man of sixty-nine, with a very melancholy face. He had lost his left eye in the Crimean War.

"I was present when he collapsed," McMahon said. "It was after he left Mr. St. George's house. He was riding across the little bridge near the entrance to the Lodge. He nearly fell out of the saddle. The horse stopped dead by instinct. Then his men

came to his rescue. They took him between hands to the barracks. The mist was so thick at the time that you could hardly see your outstretched hand."

"A heavy mist?" Fenton said. "There is always something to prevent any eyewitness account of what actually happened during an outrage of this sort. Always plenty of details of what happened afterwards, though. Never a word concerning the commission of the crime itself."

He glanced angrily in the direction of Bartly McNamara, the principal shopkeeper in the village.

"What about you, McNamara?" he said in an offensive tone. "Did you happen to be present?"

McNamara was a pale-faced little man of fifty-seven, of very delicate frame, with weak eyes and a long, pointed nose that was nearly always afflicted with a cold. Claspings and unclasping his hands nervously under the tails of his cutaway black coat, he lowered his head and peered at the District Inspector over the rims of his spectacles. Then he suddenly stretched out his neck and spat on the ground at Fenton's feet.

"That's all I care for you and your police," he snarled, "or for the whole power of Queen Victoria's army."

He made off towards his shop, half-running and half-walking. His shop was at the lower end of the square, just above the pier. He turned back now and again as he descended the slope, to wave a menacing lean hand in Fenton's direction.

"That for you and Queen Victoria," he cried every time he turned back.

Even the slightest sign of hostility, on the part of those with whom he came in contact, acutely affected Fenton's extremely sensitive nature. He felt deeply mortified by the shopkeeper's childish gesture. In fact, there was a faint constriction at the base of his throat and a quivering of the skin between his shoulder blades.

Accompanied by Head Constable Reilly, his clerk and Sergeant Geraghty, he entered the barracks and made a preliminary investigation of the facts connected with the outrage. It proved that very little was known. Beyond what was reported to the police by Captain Butcher and his three servants, there was only the discovery of some spent cartridges on the scene of the ambush and of a row-boat floating empty among the cluster of islets off the shore.

"Captain Butcher asked me to remind you, sir," Sergeant Geraghty concluded, "that he wishes to consult you before the police take any further measures."

"I see," said Fenton. "Well! Geraghty, we don't seem to have much first-hand evidence."

Geraghty, a red-faced man with protruding blue eyes, made his body very rigid and erect.

"It's as plain as the snout on a ferret who did it," he said in a solemn tone. "But the mystery is how he could manage under the circumstances to be in two places at the one time."

"You mean Michael O'Dwyer?" Fenton said in a low voice.

"I'd give my Gospel oath," Geraghty said, "that he's the culprit. Trouble is that he was nowhere near the place at the time, unless he has wings. Or else he's enchanted entirely. He went out fishing this morning in his nobby. All the boats from the village went to Galway Bay with him for the spring mackerel. They'll be gone from three weeks to a month. Constable Flannery was on patrol at the pier when he left. A crowd of people walked down the lane by the shore of the peninsula, as far as the light-house rock, same as always, to see the boats go out to sea. Flannery said that O'Dwyer's boat, the *Killuragh Lass*, was in the lead. O'Dwyer himself was at the helm. Flannery is certain of that. He was nearly as near to him as I am to you, sir, when the boat left her moorings. He stayed down at the point until the last boat was clear and turned south; tacking in search of the miserable thimble-full of wind there was to be had at the time. It was nearly dead calm. All the boats had a few big oars out and the men were pulling at them. Even so, tacking this way and that, a big nobby like the *Killuragh Lass* would be a long way from the scene of the crime, from that time till noon. It was only just break of day when they left. Flannery said that you could barely see your hand. Just break of day."

Ordering Head Constable Reilly to take charge, Fenton mounted his car to visit Captain Butcher. There was an unpleasant incident as he drove up the square towards the arched gateway leading through the ivied wall to the demesne drive. A number of village dogs, led by an old spaniel bitch, ran to attack the jaunting car. Unseen men began to whistle on a loud and sustained note of derision. The whistling continued until the car had passed through the gateway. Then it ended suddenly, as if all obeyed a given signal. The dogs also came to a halt at the gateway. Some of them, as a final gesture of contempt, cocked their hind legs against the sides of the arch.

"They are all a pack of rebels," Fenton muttered angrily.

He glanced at the driver, a civilian hired for the occasion at Clash. In spite of the mild spring weather, the man had the collar of his huge overcoat turned up to the brim of his tattered hat.

He sat very rigid and silent, with his back turned, crouching low over the horse's crupper, as if he were trying to dissociate himself completely from his unwelcome passenger.

"He, too, is a rebel," muttered Fenton. "He hates me. My God! How can I go on living like this?"

Then he started. His cheeks flushed. A wild light came into his eyes. He sat erect on the side of the car and sniffed. The yellow wheels were now rolling smoothly over the well-kept drive that ran between two lines of robust and handsome trees. The sap of the budding trees gave forth a drunkening perfume. He sniffed at this perfume several times. Then he threw back his head, closed his eyes and drew in a deep breath.

"What does it matter?" he whispered to himself softly. "In a few minutes I am going to see the woman I love. Nothing else matters. For the sake of being near her, I'd suffer anything. Anything at all."

The car debouched from the tree-lined drive on to a broad green lawn, in the centre of which stood a grey square house of three stories. He looked towards the house, swallowed a lump in his throat and began to tremble.

"My love! My love!" he whispered passionately.

Great naked uplands rose eastwards beyond the house to the curved summits of the dark blue hills. The sunlit air was loud with the music of running mountain water and of birds.

CHAPTER III

FENTON WAS ADMITTED BY a youngish butler, whose expression was very solemn in keeping with the occasion. After a short delay in front of the hall mirror, to adjust his uniform and restrain his agitation, he followed the servant to the drawing-room. He seemed to be in complete mastery over himself as he crossed the enormous room, over a black and yellow carpet, to greet his hostess. As he bowed over her hand, even the most shrewd observer would find it difficult to believe that he was madly in love with her.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am, Mrs. Butcher," he said. "It must have been a frightful shock. How is your husband now?"

"Thank you," Barbara said. "He is resting by doctor's orders, but feeling quite comfortable. He asked me to send you to him immediately. He is very anxious to see you."

Four other guests gathered around Fenton in a state of great agitation, hurling questions and even abuse at the District Inspector. They were the local parson and his wife, a landowner called Dorothy Piggott and a retired army officer called George Fitzwilliam. They were having lunch at the parsonage, making plans for a forthcoming charitable function, when they got news of the ambush. They hurried at once to Manister House. Representative of the decaying feudal class, then being destroyed by the rising power of capitalism, they felt angry and perplexed owing to the strange apathy towards their interests of a government that had hitherto been completely at their service. In their bewilderment, they were inclined to blame Fenton for the inability of the London authorities to show the former severity towards rebellion on the part of the peasants.

"When is the Government going to act?" cried Major Fitzwilliam, a choleric old man in a tight-fitting belted jacket. "When are these dastardly crimes going to be stamped out?"

"My tenants are roaming around my house at night, armed with guns," Miss Piggott said in a voice made harsh by whisky.

"Come, come," said the parson, rubbing his palms together. "We mustn't be too hasty in our judgments. The excellent constabulary is doing its utmost. At the same time, even the most moderate feel alarmed, when they see convicts on ticket of leave, like the notorious Michael Davitt, being allowed to preach sedition from public platforms."

"Parnell, a renegade member of our own class," cried Major Fitzwilliam, "is far more dangerous than Davitt."

"The House of Peers is to blame," said Miss Piggott. "They have surrendered in a most abject fashion to Gladstone and his crew."

"I'll take you to my husband," Barbara said, coming to Fenton's rescue.

She walked down the long room in front of him. Tall and of voluptuous proportions, she was now in the flower of her sensual beauty at the age of thirty-one. She had a strong face like a man. Her face would look cruel and probably repulsive were it not for the expression of deep sadness in her large golden eyes, that turned up slightly at the outside corners. Her complexion was tawny. There was always a faint glow in her cheeks, as if she were permanently excited by some hidden emotion. She wore her nut-brown hair in thick plaits at the back of her poll. She had on a yellow dress with a deep flounce of black satin to the skirt and black lace frills about the throat.

She had formerly been married to an army officer named

Devereaux. He had died of drink and penury four years previously. A year later, Neville Butcher took her for his second wife. She had no children by either husband.

"I'm sorry those people were so rude to you," she said to Fenton in a low voice as they mounted the broad stairway side by side.

Fenton was afraid to look at her, even though he knew that she was looking at him and he could hear her excited breathing. Whenever he found himself alone with her, his passion made him inarticulate and conscience-stricken.

"I dare say they mean well," he said after a long pause.

"Even so," Barbara said, lowering her voice still further and slackening her pace. "I find it insufferable that people should be so stupid. The people here bore me terribly."

She put her hand on the banister, halted and turned towards him. He kept his eyes averted for a few moments, but his agitation increased until it became almost unbearable. Even without looking at her, he could feel the power of her eyes.

"Tell me," she whispered, in a voice whose passionate tenderness made him tremble, "whether you hate this sort of life as much as I do?"

Then he finally raised his eyes and looked at her. It was obvious to him that she was under the influence of some violent passion. He could not say whether it was anger or something more tender. In either case, it sent the blood coursing madly through his veins. He wanted terribly to throw his arms around her and confess his love.

Yet he merely said in a casual tone:

"It is rather boring, I admit."

Barbara's face became contemptuous. She drew in a deep breath, raising her magnificent bosom. At the same time, she drew the fingertips of her left hand across the heart of the palm, making a rasping sound. Then she suddenly expelled her breath, shrugged her shoulders, raised her skirts and marched up the stairs rapidly.

Fenton bit his upper lip and stood for several moments looking after her, feeling terribly ashamed of his cowardice. Then he suddenly rushed forward, determined to speak to her. Yet when he drew alongside and she glanced at him with that contemptuous look in her eyes, he again lost heart. He slackened his pace and allowed her to precede him by several yards as they marched down the corridor towards Neville's room.

"Mr. Fenton is here to see you, Neville," she said brusquely as she threw open the door.

She was striding back along the corridor once more when Fenton passed her. Looking straight in front of her, she did not deign to glance at him.

Fenton shuddered miserably as he saw the look of contempt in her golden eyes.

CHAPTER IV

BUTCHER WAS RESTING ON a large canopied bed, with his bandaged torso propped against a number of pillows. He seemed to have aged a great deal since calling on Raoul. His jaw sagged. His small grey eyes, however, looked cunning and alert.

"I'm awfully sorry, Captain Butcher . . ." Fenton began on entering the room.

"Cut out the formality," Butcher interrupted in a cordial tone that did not sound very sincere. "I asked you to come here as a friend and a fellow-countryman, not as an officer of constabulary. I'm feeling low, Fenton. Pull up a chair. I'm feeling damned low."

Fenton closed the door and then went to fetch a chair.

"Too bad, really," he said. "Can be awfully painful, broken ribs. Once broke some of my own in a hunting accident."

When Fenton's back was turned, Butcher's expression changed from cordiality to dislike. The cordial expression returned as Fenton approached the bedside with a chair.

"Couple of broken ribs wouldn't keep me in bed," he said. "It's the fall, my dear fellow. I got badly shaken. See Geraghty? Anything new?"

Fenton sat down, crossed his legs and said in a casual tone:

"They found an empty row-boat drifting among the islands off the south side of the peninsula."

"Ha!" said Butcher. "I thought they would."

Fenton looked sharply at Butcher. His recent experience with Barbara had left him feeling angry and frustrated.

"Why did you think they would find a row-boat?" he said.

"Only way O'Dwyer could get back to his nobby after firing at me," Butcher said.

"Oh!" said Fenton, extremely irritated by Butcher's casual manner. "Then you think that O'Dwyer . . .?"

"Let me show you something before we go any further," Butcher interrupted. "This may help to explain things."

He threw back the bedclothes and pulled up his night-shirt, exposing his right buttock, in which there was a deep hole.

"See that hole?" he said.

"Gunshot?" Fenton said.

"Blunderbuss at close range," Butcher said. "O'Dwyer's father did it."

"John O'Dwyer?" said Fenton. "I heard of the affair."

"He shot my bailiff dead," Butcher said, "together with wounding myself severely."

"Got hanged, didn't he?" Fenton said.

"Yes," Butcher said. "When the son returned to Manister from America a year ago, I understood at once what he had in mind. I have been waiting for him to strike ever since."

"Geraghty is of your point of view," Fenton said. "At the same time, it's going to be difficult to obtain a conviction. The man has an excellent alibi."

"Exactly," Butcher said. "I want to talk to you about that. This land war is a complicated business. I have two sons in the army, both on active service at this moment. Nigel is with Sir Frederick Roberts in Afghanistan. Fought at Peiwar Kotul and is still in the thick of things. Robert sailed for South Africa a few weeks ago to fight the Zulus. Going out to join Lord Chelmsford's force. The Zulu is a tough enemy, when you consider what Cetewayo did to our fellows last January at Isandhlwana. I have no desire to minimize the importance of these two wars, on the frontiers of the Empire. Neither am I conceited enough to put myself on a level with my two sons, who are gallantly serving their Queen. Thank God that I've been able to give them advantages I didn't enjoy. A good public school and the army. I'm just a plain Englishman, son of a Berkshire yeoman. My rank of captain is mere eye-wash. You know yourself that I'm just a captain of Irish militia. I'm a self-made man and I frankly admit it. Yet I feel that my work here in Ireland is more important to the Empire than what my sons are doing. I'm defending the feudal system and the landowning gentry, on whom the power of England is based. If that system and that class are destroyed, then England is doomed within the space of a few generations."

"Quite an interesting theory," Fenton said irritably.

"With me it's not a theory," Butcher said, "but an article of faith."

"Really?" said Fenton.

"England is already beginning to rot at the core," Butcher continued with heat. "Since the capitalists got into the saddle,

Liberals and Radicals have become all-powerful in the Government. Because of them, Fenton, you and I are obliged to fight rebellion with one hand tied behind our backs. We can't deal with the Irish in the way Roberts is dealing with the Afghans and Chelmsford with the Zulus. No, sir. If we show the least sign of undue severity, as the Liberals put it, there is a rumpus in Parliament. Why? Because the Irish peasant now has a vote. Furthermore, he is a customer for English manufactured goods. The capitalists coddle him and fight the Irish landlords, because they want all the peasant's money in exchange for their goods. They are opposed to land rents, the payment of which curtails the peasant's purchasing power. Do you follow me, Fenton?"

"What has all this got to do with O'Dwyer?" Fenton said insolently.

"It has this to do with it," Butcher said. "In dealing with O'Dwyer we have to use cunning. Otherwise, the Liberals are going to pounce on us."

"I'm afraid that I disagree," Fenton said. "The essence of English law, like the Roman, is impartial justice."

"Good Heavens!" Butcher cried in horror. "You are talking like a Liberal yourself."

"Nothing criminal about being a Liberal," Fenton said in a low voice.

"What?" Butcher shouted, purple in the face. "Are you serious?"

"I'm not in the habit of being flippant," Fenton said.

Although he spoke quietly and seemed to be in complete control of himself, he was really getting terribly afraid of Butcher. He found it increasingly difficult to breathe. He tugged at the collar of his uniform, in an effort to give himself more air.

Butcher glared in silence at his guest for a while. There was hatred in his little grey eyes. Then he suddenly assumed a cordial expression once more.

"Let's forget about the damn thing," he said heartily. "Let me tell you about this hole in my buttock. As you may know, I bought this property from Marcus St. George in 1852. In the previous year I had married and become agent for Lord Mongoolle's Clash estate. There was complete chaos at the time, after the great famine. Peasants were still dying in droves. Others were emigrating. Properties were being auctioned. Having a little money on hand—I had married well—I bought Manister. Unlike other Englishmen that were buying Irish land at the time, I had no ambition to become a foxhunting loafer. As I said before, I come of yeoman stock. I love land. Just to possess it is a passion

with me. In addition, I'm no fool in business matters. I could see how things were going. With industry developing in England at a colossal pace, a man didn't have to be a wizard in order to see that rural Ireland would become England's cattle market. So I decided to clear Manister of peasants and raise cattle. Most of the new English landowners were doing the same thing. I ran into opposition at once. It was really astonishing. The number of Irish people had been reduced by three millions in a few years, through hunger and fever, yet they continued to resist. They fought us tooth and nail. How do you explain it, Fenton? Is it courage or sheer obstinacy?"

Fenton shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. He was bored with the recital.

"John O'Dwyer was leader of the tenants on my estate," Butcher continued. "Curiously enough, he was not a peasant. The O'Dwyers were shipbuilders in Clash for centuries, a wealthy family at one time. The famine ruined them, as it did nearly everybody else. He was just a natural leader, I suppose, so he took command, finding a number of fellows eager to fight and in search of a leader. It was a pity that he had a kink in him, turning him into a rebel. He would have made a fine soldier. He was the type, fearless and coolheaded. He put up a good fight against me. Then I got a confederate among his followers and that was the end of O'Dwyer."

He smiled broadly and cracked the thumb of his left hand against the third finger.

"But he nearly got you, judging by that hole," said Fenton viciously.

Butcher chuckled as he rubbed his large hands together.

"I had to take that chance," he said.

"How do you mean?" said Fenton.

"I laid a trap for him," Butcher said.

"Really?" said Fenton with mounting indignation. "You mean to say that you arranged the ambush?"

"I even bought the blunderbuss," Butcher said.

He again smiled and rubbed his hands together.

"I see," said Fenton. "You mean to lay another trap. Is that it?"

"Exactly," said Butcher. "Otherwise, it would be impossible to hang O'Dwyer. There is not enough evidence to place before a jury for a conviction. You know very well that it's no longer possible to pack a jury. The Liberals have stopped all that."

"I take it that you sent for me," Fenton continued slowly, "because you want my co-operation."

"I've always had an understanding with the Constabulary officers in my district," Butcher said.

"What if I am an exception to this rule?" Fenton said.

"I can be a very hard man when crossed," Butcher said. "I have very considerable influence in the county."

"Are you threatening me?" Fenton said.

"Threatening you?" said Butcher. "What an idea! Come now. I'm asking you to do nothing extraordinary."

"Then why don't you say what you want?" said Fenton. "Why do you beat about the bush?"

Butcher stretched out his legs to their full length under the bedclothes and sighed.

"For twelve long months," he said bitterly, "I've been going about in a steel waistcoat, accompanied by a bloodhound and body-servants, waiting for that ruffian to shoot. I've felt humiliated day and night, every moment of that time. I'm determined to make him suffer for every moment of my humiliation. Every moment. Do you understand? I'm going to take no chance of his escaping me. I am determined to see him die, swinging from the end of a rope. You understand?"

Becoming more and more frightened, Fenton struggled hard against submitting. He knew instinctively that Butcher's proposal, whatever it was, would degrade him.

"I have never done anything irregular during my time in the service," he said harshly.

Butcher finally lost his temper completely with his victim. He looked Fenton straight in the eyes with the fixity of a pointer dog.

"I'm afraid that you don't understand me yet, Fenton," he said in a menacing tone.

Fenton shuddered. Now he was more than frightened. He was mortally terrified. At this instant he understood everything. He knew why the landowner had been so kind to him ever since his arrival in the district six months previously. He understood why so many opportunities for being along with Barbara had been put his way. He knew that he had been deliberately led into a trap. Flight now seemed to him the most desirable thing in the world. He had to keep his feet pressed hard against the floor, in order to conceal the trembling of his knees.

Butcher was now looking at the far wall. He seemed to have sunk into a reverie. There was dead silence in the room. The silence was like a weight pressing against Fenton's chest. It became unendurable. He gasped, swallowed his breath and sat forward abruptly in his chair, staring at Butcher intently.

"What do you want me to do?" he cried in a shrill tone.

Now it was apparent that Butcher had not been sunk in a reverie. He turned sharply towards Fenton with a smile of triumph on his face.

"Good," he said. "I knew we'd finally see eye to eye. I want you to do nothing at all until I give the signal. Call off your men, stop the investigation and give the impression that the police have dropped the whole thing. That will keep him in a state of doubt and suspicion. It may be a month from now, or two months, or three, before he is ready to strike again. These terrorists nerve themselves to a certain action. Afterwards they feel exhausted. It takes time before they gather strength for another blow. It's a sort of delirium."

"Now I understand perfectly," Fenton said in a peculiarly harsh tone. "You want him to commit a murder."

"Call it what you like," Butcher said. "When the time is ripe, I want certain documents that are in your office at Clash and . . ."

Fenton jumped to his feet. His lips felt terribly dry.

"You want me to become your accomplice in arranging this murder?" he cried.

"Sit down," Butcher said brutally.

"This is frightful," Fenton said, suddenly lowering his voice to an almost inaudible whisper.

"Sit down," Butcher repeated.

Fenton made a supreme effort to bolt from the room. He failed utterly. He sat down slowly, took out his handkerchief, folded a corner of it around the forefinger of his left hand and wiped the exterior of his lips.

CHAPTER V

LETTICE SAT BY THE WINDOW of her aunt's bedroom, listening to the patter of raindrops on the terrace roof and watching a rainbow that stood over the sea beyond the lighthouse tower. In spite of the rain, the sun shone brightly and larks were singing in the sky. April had come, with its strange harmony of tears and laughter, like a woman distraught with love.

"I do wish you could see this beautiful rainbow, Aunt Elizabeth," she said as she leaned far out over the sill of the open window to get a better view.

Her thin face was flushed with happiness. Her eyes sparkled.

"I can hear the larks singing," Elizabeth said softly. "Oh! Lovely, gentle April! Everything is beautiful in April. It's the month that pleases me most."

"It would make you completely well to see this rainbow," Lettice said. "Such beauty must surely have healing powers."

"I'm sorry to be a nuisance," Elizabeth said, "lying here in bed when there is so much work to be done."

She had kept to her bed for a whole month, ever since the day of the shooting. She was not really ill. At the moment, however, the late afternoon made her look very pale and emaciated in her night bonnet.

"But you're not in the least a nuisance," Lettice said indignantly as she turned her head. "How could you possibly say such a thing?"

"To-morrow, please God," said Elizabeth, "I'm going to be on my feet again."

"I love looking after the house," Lettice said. "It makes me feel important. I'd be ever so happy were it not for your being ill."

"Don't worry about me," said Elizabeth. "I've always been delicate, just like my brother Julian, God rest his soul. I'm unable to bear any unpleasant shock. Yet I'm very tenacious. I've recovered from this bout, my dear. I feel it."

"How wonderful!" Lettice said. "I'm so happy to hear you say that."

"I'm very proud of you, Lettice," Elizabeth said. "You are a born housekeeper."

"Oh! Thank you," Lettice said shyly. "I've had a great deal of experience, you know. In Paris, I practically looked after our house for the past three years. Father insisted on my learning what he calls 'a woman's profession' very thoroughly."

Elizabeth sniffed. She was still very annoyed with her brother, so she bridled up at reference to him.

"Tell me about the rainbow, my dear," she said. "Is it distinct? At this time of year they can be radiantly beautiful."

"Oh! It's very distinct," Lettice said eagerly as she turned to look out the window once more. "It seems so near that I keep wanting to reach out my hand and touch it."

"I love rainbows," said Elizabeth. "They are so delicate and graceful."

"I can see both ends," Lettice said, "so close together that it's like a big hoop perched on the sea. Oh! How sad!"

"What happened, my dear?" said Elizabeth.

"It's gone," Lettice said with a deep sigh. "It went suddenly, as if by magic. The people say that it's a sign given to us by God,

promising that the world will never again be flooded. Do you believe that, Aunt Elizabeth?"

"No," said Elizabeth. "That is merely a popular superstition."

"I believe it," said Lettice. "I want to believe everything that is beautiful and harmless. The people are very fortunate in that way. They give a divine meaning to everything. That is because they have faith."

"Faith is the greatest gift that God has given us," Elizabeth said.

"The people are very wise," Lettice said, "in spite of being so poorly educated. Their wisdom is beautiful and without malice."

"You are getting fond of them," said Elizabeth.

Lettice now turned around completely towards her aunt. She wrinkled her forehead in thought and smoothed out the skirts of her grey dress.

"It's not so much that I've become fond of them," she said, "as that they have become fond of me. I wanted to be friends with them ever since I came from France. Yet I felt that they were hostile towards father and myself, even though they were invariably polite. Now it's different. They gather round me when I go to the village, as if I had suddenly become very dear to them. They have become equally fond of father. As a result, I am certain that he has been happier during the past few weeks than I have ever known him. I really believe that he has finally begun to write his book."

She laughed gaily and said:

"Ever since I can remember, he has been on the point of beginning to write that book. It's very mysterious. He never talks about it and he keeps his notes under lock and key."

"I knew this would happen," Elizabeth said gloomily. "It's because we failed to do our duty. The people now feel that we are their accomplices. They have finally managed to drag us down to their level."

Lettice stared at her aunt in surprise. It was the first time that either of them had referred, even indirectly, to O'Dwyer's presence in the kitchen on the day of the shooting. Indeed, Elizabeth had taken to her bed, on the evening of that day, owing to the peremptory manner in which Raoul had ordered them both never to mention the incident. What had irritated Elizabeth particularly was the fact that he issued this command in the servant's presence, including the servant and putting her on the same level as his daughter and sister. This was precisely what Elizabeth meant, when she spoke of "being dragged down to their level."

"Dear Aunt," Lettice said, "surely you don't mean to say that father should take sides with the landlords against the people."

"I most certainly do," said Elizabeth sharply.

"May I ask the reason?" said Lettice.

"Your father is a gentleman," Elizabeth said, "even though he is no longer in enjoyment of his estates. His duty as a gentleman commands him to help maintain law and order."

"I can't understand you," said Lettice in a low voice.

"Why not, child?" said Elizabeth.

"But the landlords are Protestants, nearly all of them," Lettice said, "and you are a Catholic. So are the people Catholics. Surely, it would be your duty to side with people of your own religious persuasion against . . ."

"Religion has nothing to do with it," Elizabeth interrupted. "I am a Catholic because my father made me one. My becoming a Catholic had nothing to do with rebellion against authority. Quite the contrary. My father, when God gave him grace to find his way back to the true faith, was merely putting an end to a period of rebellion. All the troubles of modern times come from rebellion against the authority of Christ's vicar on earth, the Pope of Rome."

"How interesting!" Lettice said. "Please tell me about grandfather's conversion to Catholicism. It must require a most profound spiritual disturbance to make a mature man change his religion. Especially here in Ireland, where people take their religion so seriously."

"It was during the famine," Elizabeth said. "The shock of seeing people die of hunger and cholera influenced him. God spoke to him through the agency of an old woman, whom he met on the road. The old woman told him about the curse."

"What is that curse?" Lettice said. "I have heard you speak of it several times, as if it were something in which you really believe."

Tears suddenly began to flow down Elizabeth's cheeks and her upper lip quivered.

"Come and sit near me, child," she said. "I don't want you to think ill of me, because I love you dearly."

Lettice came over to the bed, lay down and put her arms around Elizabeth's neck. They embraced. Then Lettice put her head on the pillow and stroked Elizabeth's hand.

"Please tell me about your parents," Lettice said, "and how you lived when you were young. Father has told me nothing at all about them. I think he wanted me to grow up in complete ignorance of Ireland and of my forbears. Oddly enough, he has

talked to me a great deal during the past weeks about Manister and not a word about my forbears. Yet what he told me about Manister is very romantic, about traders coming from Crete and Egypt thousands of years ago to take away the gold of its streams, about great oak forests that covered what are now naked hills, about the university and the cathedral that were here in the eighth century, with students coming from over all the known world. Can you believe it, Aunt?"

"If your father says so," Elizabeth said. "He is a learned man."

"I'm sorry you distrust the people," Lettice continued, "because I want to feel that I belong to them, that I am of their blood and they of mine, that I belong to their earth and their history. In France there were no people to whom I wanted to belong. Father and I only knew exiles like ourselves. It was very lonely. My mother's parents were both dead when she married father. She, too, was of Irish blood. Her father, Colonel O'Brien, was an ardent Irish patriot, even though he had never seen our country. I barely remember my mother. She died when I was four. I had only portraits for relatives. Why did father want to forget about Ireland? Did something very unpleasant happen before he went abroad?"

"It's a sad story, child," Elizabeth said. "To begin with, a curse was put on the St. George family, when they became Protestants at the time of the Reformation and drove the monks from the great abbey of Manister. Since that day to this, misfortune has pursued the family. The Abbot cursed them by bell, book and candle light."

"Really?" said Lettice. "It was only natural that he should have been angry at being evicted, poor man."

"The curse said that disaster would fall on all heretics who would ever live on monastery lands," Elizabeth continued.

"That means Captain Butcher," Lettice said. "That is why you said the curse had fallen on him."

"This house also belonged to the monks," Elizabeth said, "and the farm."

"I see," Lettice said. "You mean that father and I, being heretics, are liable to be affected by the curse."

"It was all mother's fault," said Elizabeth. "Were it not for her, your father would have been baptised with Julian and myself. When my father ordered the whole family to get baptised, mother tried to abduct Julian and myself. Father galloped after the stage coach and rescued us. Mother went on to Dublin, where Raoul was then attending the university. She persuaded Raoul to ignore father's urgent letters, thereby committing a grievous sin."

Remaining a Protestant might be excused, but there was no excuse for denying the benefits of holy baptism to her firstborn son."

"But she may have believed strongly in the Protestant faith," said Lettice.

"Grandfather Curran was a bigoted Protestant and a wealthy man," Elizabeth continued. "Mother went to his house in Dublin and pleaded with him. She persuaded him to bestow an annuity on Raoul, but only on condition that he did not embrace the Catholic faith. Raoul accepted the annuity and did not return to Manister to get baptised. Father was very naturally furious. To cap it all, Julian had to be given a sound whipping before he would consent to be baptised. The poor boy was only twelve at the time and already delicate, but he was headstrong, like all of our blood. He wept in my arms throughout the whole night before the ceremony."

"What a strange tale!" Lettice said. "And you, Aunt Elizabeth? Did you, too, rebel?"

"A woman's first duty is obedience," Elizabeth said. "The peace of God descended on me, from the moment I was admitted to the true Church. Yet God began to try our faith almost at once. We lost Manister House and came here to the Lodge. The blow was too much for father. A man of inordinate pride, he could not suffer the thought of a common person like Captain Butcher living at Manister House. So he died within a few months of chagrin. Mother then came from Dublin to look after Julian and myself. She was like a stranger to me, from that day until her death, even though I prayed for her constantly."

"How sad!" Lettice said. "What a sad story!"

"Raoul was even more a stranger to me than mother," Elizabeth said. "She was merely bigoted and perverse, like Grandfather Curran, but Raoul had become a violent rebel against all authority. Even while still a student, he had become a member of seditious societies. Yet God had given him all the talents necessary for a brilliant career. And he was so handsome in those days. You've no idea, child, how handsome your father was as a young man."

"But he is still very handsome," Lettice said.

"In his youth," said Elizabeth, "he had the fire of genius in his eyes. Everybody expected him to sweep all before him at the Bar. Instead, he wasted his great gifts on defending rebels. The curse had fallen on him. He had to leave Ireland within a few years in order to avoid getting arrested."

Lettice raised her head from the pillow and looked at her aunt

with hostility. Then she got to her feet quietly and walked over to the window almost on tip-toe.

"Now he's beginning all over again," Elizabeth said, in a tone that had become bitter and querulous. "I'm terribly unhappy about it. I had hopes that he would come to a sense of his responsibilities after all those years abroad. He has you to consider now. You are on the threshold of your life, with your marriage to be taken into . . ."

"Please, Aunt Elizabeth," Lettice said, as she looked out the window with her back turned. "You mustn't talk like that about my father."

"I refuse to be silent any longer," Elizabeth cried angrily.

Lettice swung round and faced her aunt. Her cheeks were now almost as red as her hair.

"I share all my father's views," she cried proudly. "All of them. He is a very wonderful and courageous man. It is stupid and narrowminded to find fault with him, simply because he believes in freedom of thought."

Seeing that her aunt was on the verge of tears, she at once felt remorse for having spoken so harshly. She ran across the room and threw herself on her knees beside the bed. She grasped Elizabeth's worn hand and kissed it tenderly.

"Dear Aunt, forgive me for having said such cruel things," she whispered in a tremulous voice. "I love you so much and you are so gentle. It was most shameful on my part."

Elizabeth did not answer for some time. She was looking at her niece fixedly, as if she had become afraid of the girl.

"I forgive you, child," she said at length. "You have a pure heart."

"Thank you," Lettice whispered.

She put the palm of Elizabeth's hand against her forehead and added:

"You have suffered so much in your life. So much."

"May God protect you, child," Elizabeth said, stroking the girl's hair tenderly. "May He show you, too, that real happiness comes from bowing . . ."

She was interrupted by a loud knocking at the hall door. Lettice jumped to her feet at once. Elizabeth shuddered.

"I must answer the door," Lettice said. "Annie has gone to the village."

On reaching the head of the stairs, Lettice looked down and saw that her father had already opened the hall door to a man of extremely odd appearance.

CHAPTER VI

THE VISITOR WAS A PRIEST named Francis Kelly, long since barred from exercise of his duties by edict of the Church. He had been living in the tavern of his brother-in-law at Clash for the past twelve years. That he made his home in a tavern was no indication of the reason why disciplinary action had been taken against him. In fact, he was of a most ascetic nature. He had been punished for taking part in the abortive insurrection of 1867.

Now in his forty-sixth year, he was short of stature, very thin, with extremely bowed legs that made his arms and back look unnaturally long. His large head hung forward a little, causing his shoulders to stoop. This physical ugliness was due to a disease contracted as a child, which was known as famine fever. His face was triangular in shape, dark-skinned and haggard, with sunken eyes. His hair was grey and he wore it cut close like a monk. His clerical costume was very shabby. He wore hob-nailed boots and he carried an ash plant that was almost as tall as himself.

Raoul was astonished to find such an odd-looking man at the door.

"Are you Mr. St. George?" Father Francis said.

"Yes," said Raoul. "Who might you be?"

"Francis Kelly," said the priest. "I'd feel obliged if I could have a few words with you in private."

Raoul led the way into his study, a small room that opened off the hall. Father Francis raised his feet high when he walked, on account of his heavy boots being too large for him. He went direct to the hearth, on which a small turf fire was burning. He sat down, laid his ash plant on the floor carefully, held his hands to the blaze for a few moments and then rubbed them together. He remained hatted. Presently, he took a plug of tobacco and a knife from his pocket. While paring some tobacco on to the palm of his hand, he glanced all round the room.

There was only a meagre light, the two windows being somewhat obscured by the trellis vines and bushes outside. The walls were lined with books, right up to the ceiling. On the floor, also, there were piles of books. A deal table that stretched almost the whole length of the wall was littered with manuscripts and writing materials. A pipe stand and some chairs completed the furnishing. The floor was naked.

"Ha!" said Father Francis, turning towards Raoul after he had finished his examination. "I see you are a writer. What do you write?"

"You said you had a message," Raoul said curtly.

He was annoyed by his visitor's casual manner.

"I write ballads," Father Francis said imperturbably. "That's why I asked what you were writing. I mean no offence. You may think that ballads are vulgar things of no consequence. If you think so, you are wrong. Ballads are very important, because people sing them if they are any good. They are the poetry of the people. Poetry should be sung. That's the only way it can become part of life, what it should be, instead of being buried in books. Ballads can overthrow empires and bring new nations into existence."

Raoul sat down opposite the priest. He stroked his beard and smiled. He was beginning to feel attracted by his strange guest.

"Who are you?" he said.

"I told you that my name is Francis Kelly," said the priest.

Raoul shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Names are unimportant."

"You are right," Father Francis said. "It's impossible to give a name to the human soul."

There was silence for a little while. The priest took a clay pipe from his pocket and stuffed the pared tobacco into the bowl. Then he took a live coal from the fire with the tongs, held it against the bowl and sucked hard several times. When clouds of smoke began to issue from his mouth, he threw the coal back into the fire and wiped his lips with a large red handkerchief. Then he looked at Raoul, half-closed his eyes and spoke in a mysterious whisper, hardly opening his lips.

"Would you care to have a talk with young O'Dwyer now?" he said.

"I don't follow you," said Raoul cautiously.

Father Francis laughed.

"I don't blame you for being careful," he said. "Everybody in the county knows that I'm a Fenian, but I might be a government spy as far as you know. Spies often dress like priests."

"I'm sure you write excellent ballads," Raoul said with a smile. "I'm looking forward to reading them. Unfortunately, I can't sing."

"You can do far more important things," said Father Francis. "That was an important thing you did a month ago, when you found O'Dwyer unconscious at the bottom of the settle-bed in your kitchen. You made many a friend among the people that

day. If you had a mind, you could do far more important things still."

"You interest me," Raoul said.

"O'Dwyer said you invited him to visit you," the priest continued.

"Where is the young man?" Raoul said.

"He's outside there," said Father Francis, nodding towards the window, "waiting for a signal from me."

"Really?" said Raoul. "Why didn't he come with you?"

"I wanted to see if the coast were clear," the priest said. "Your sister doesn't sympathise with us and you yourself might have changed your mind. Then again, O'Dwyer is in a bad state of mind. The Government people are playing with him, the way a cat plays with a mouse. Having no evidence that could convict him before a jury, they are pretending to look the other way. Yet they watch him the whole time, ready to pounce when it suits them. That sort of thing is hard on a young man like O'Dwyer. He's in a bad state. I thought I'd tell you that first, so you wouldn't be offended by his strange manners. By your leave, I'll call him now."

"By all means," Raoul said.

The priest went to the window, opened it wide, leaned out and whistled softly. There was an answering whistle almost at once. Then the priest went out to open the hall door.

"This is all very fortunate," Raoul said, caressing his beard. "I feel that I'm on the verge of finally becoming involved in something decisive."

O'Dwyer seemed to be in great spirits when he came into the room, contrary to what Father Francis had said about his temper. He was wearing a well-fitting suit of blue serge that made him look very smart. With his face lighted by a gay smile, he came over to Raoul, shook hands and began to apologise for the trouble he had caused on their previous meeting.

"How is the cut?" Raoul interrupted. "Upon my soul! I see no trace of it."

"It was only a scratch," O'Dwyer said with a shrug of his shoulders. "It has been healed for weeks."

"Do sit down," Raoul said. "I envy your strength. One moment you were lying unconscious on the kitchen table, dead to the world, as Annie Fitzpatrick would say. The next moment you were gone. I was very impressed by your vitality. I wanted terribly to know why a man of your great energy and courage could behave in such a stupid fashion."

O'Dwyer had sat down in front of the fire between Raoul and

Father Francis. His gaiety of expression changed suddenly as Raoul uttered the word "stupid." His face became frightening. Now it was apparent that Father Francis had not exaggerated when he said that the young man was in a bad state of mind.

"What do you mean by that remark?" O'Dwyer said slowly, clasping his laced fingers so tightly that the blood went out of them.

His cruel blue eyes were staring fixedly at Raoul, who was unable to prevent himself from feeling a little nervous.

"You are the living image of your father," Raoul said. "I recognised you that day in my kitchen. Your father was the bosom friend of my youth. He was some years older than I, but similarity of ideas brought us together. Had he lived, he might have done great things. He had a brilliant intellect, together with indomitable courage and a natural capacity for leadership. His death was a great blow, not only to his friends, but to his country."

"Thank you, sir," O'Dwyer said in an angry tone, as he bowed jerkily.

"I had an idea," Raoul continued, putting the tips of his fingers to his beard, "that you were trying to revenge your father's death."

O'Dwyer remained silent. He continued to stare fixedly at Raoul.

"Next to love," said Raoul, "revenge is possibly the most exalted emotion. However, it must be subtle in order to be completely satisfying."

He paused for a moment, smiled and then added in a lower tone:

"If Butcher had not been wearing a metal vest, where would he be now?"

"In hell," O'Dwyer said curtly.

Raoul shrugged his shoulders.

"If such a place really exists, which I doubt," he said, "we have no guarantee that Butcher would now be there. He is a clever fellow, and a famous man has said that God is always on the side of the big battalions. One simply does not know. All one knows is that he would be dead and out of mortal pain. Death by gunfire must be a pleasant sort of death, sudden and rather exciting. If I wanted to revenge myself on an enemy, I'd choose a much more subtle and lingering method."

He paused, smiled once more and added:

"I'd torture him."

Father Francis took his clay pipe out of his mouth, stared at Raoul in horror and then got to his feet.

"That's a terrible thing you have said," he cried angrily. "Let me tell you that the Irish people would never tolerate such methods. They are gentle and good people. What you are advocating is paganism."

O'Dwyer put his hand on the priest's arm and said curtly, like a man speaking to a subordinate:

"Sit down."

The priest winced on feeling the rough touch of O'Dwyer's arm. He looked at the young man reproachfully, as he resumed his seat.

"What kind of torture do you mean?" O'Dwyer said to Raoul.

"The torture of isolation," Raoul said.

"Isolation?" said O'Dwyer.

"To isolate an enemy in the military sense," Raoul said, "means cutting him off from all means of supply, reinforcement and escape. In this instance, I give a different meaning to the word. The isolation of Captain Butcher would not need to be physically complete, in order to be effective and bring about his destruction. He would merely require to be deprived of his power little by little, until he was alone and utterly helpless."

"Horrible!" Father Francis said.

Raoul looked at the priest haughtily and said:

"To isolate a priest, for instance, one denies him access to the performance of certain rites, by means of which he renews his belief in God and the immortality of the soul."

Father Francis jumped to his feet once more.

"All that is paganism," he cried. "It's inspired by the Devil."

"How many times more do I have to tell you to keep quiet?"

O'Dwyer said in the same curt tone. "Sit down at once."

"Michael," said the priest in a humiliated voice, "I didn't think your father's son would say a thing like that to me."

O'Dwyer flushed a little and glanced towards Raoul.

"All right," he said gruffly, looking once more at the priest.

"Forget about it."

"I went out with the Fenians in '67," Father Francis cried, with a note of arrogant defiance in his voice. "For that act of rebellion against my vow of obedience, I have since been deprived of the right to administer the sacraments. For twelve years I have followed my fate, the most miserable of God's creatures, an anointed priest that is denied the right to perform the miracle of all miracles."

"That's enough now," O'Dwyer said.

"I thought so," Raoul said to himself. "An isolated priest. The torture of the Vatican."

He got to his feet and bowed to Father Francis with great ceremony.

"I apologise," he said, "for failing to realise that you are a great poet, until you spoke just now. Won't you shake hands and forgive me for my discourtesy?"

The priest hesitated for a moment, while he looked at Raoul critically. Then he suddenly grasped Raoul's extended hand.

"Forgive me, too," he said with deep emotion, "for failing to realise that you are a good man. Even though you say queer things, that no good man should say, you are still a good man. We all have our foolish vanities. I see that giving voice to queer ideas is your pet vanity. God will forgive you for that. God forgives everything to the good. I want to be friends with you."

"Splendid!" said Raoul. "I know that I'm going to value your friendship highly. The soldier, the poet and the monk represent what is finest in man. They represent man's will to power, to beauty and to immortality. They alone among men are capable of complete love, because they love the unattainable. Their love is never tarnished by possession. Before all three of them, I always bow low. When I bowed to you, I bowed to all three."

Father Francis sat down, took out a large red handkerchief and blew his nose violently to conceal his emotion. Raoul also sat down.

"How would you go about destroying an enemy by means of isolation?" said O'Dwyer, who had been staring intently at the fire during this interlude.

"For that," said Raoul, "the efforts of a single man, or even a group of picked men like the Fenian Society, would be useless. The help of the whole people would be necessary."

"The whole people?" O'Dwyer said excitedly, now fixing his gaze on Raoul.

"The whole people," Raoul said, "disciplined and acting in obedience to a single will."

There was silence for a few moments. Then O'Dwyer's face suddenly lit with enthusiasm.

"I see that you now understand me," Raoul said, touching his beard with his finger-tips.

"Maybe I do," O'Dwyer said. "I want to hear your plan."

"So do I," Father Francis said.

"Then you are no longer opposed to the idea of torture?" Raoul said to the priest.

"Who am I to condemn the methods of such a wise man as you?" Father Francis said. "Great ideas are more powerful than an army with banners."

"Thank you," Raoul said, getting to his feet. "I'll tell you about my plan, as soon as I have notified my daughter that she has two guests for supper. You can both stay, I trust."

The two men accepted the invitation.

"Good," said Raoul. "I hope that we have laid plans for setting the wheel of Irish destiny spinning by supper-time. I'm not a mystic, but I believe in destiny. A vice of some sort is necessary to maintain sanity."

CHAPTER VII

LETTICE LOOKED FRIGHTENED when Raoul came into the living-room and told her that O'Dwyer was staying to supper. Raoul put his arm around her shoulders and kissed her on the forehead.

"You mustn't be nervous of him, child," he said. "He is by no means savage. Quite the contrary. After all, you should be used to entertaining revolutionaries. The most famous of them came to our house in Paris. You should know by now that idealists, even those who resort to violence, are usually the most gentle among human beings."

"I know that, Father," Lettice said, blushing still more deeply.

"I like O'Dwyer," Raoul said as he walked out of the room. "Father Kelly is also a person of extraordinary quality."

He was too preoccupied with his ideas to notice that it was not fear of again meeting O'Dwyer that startled his daughter and made her blush. Elizabeth had been just as insensitive to the first tender throbbing of a young girl's heart, when Lettice had entered the living-room after leaving the empty jug in the kitchen on the day of the shooting. It was shyness of a new and strange emotion within her own breast that had startled Lettice, now as on that other day.

During the past month, she had experienced this emotion many times. It came upon her suddenly, unassociated with an image or memory of any sort, in her room, walking by the river among the wild daffodils, watching the waves rise and fall by the lighthouse rock. It had come to her in Elizabeth's room, while she was looking at the rainbow. It had no name, no voice, no substance. It was the awareness of beauty still in the womb, at whose door life is waiting with a key for the moment of birth.

Yet she looked perfectly composed when she sat opposite her father at table in their little dining-room, with O'Dwyer on her left and Father Francis on her right. Raoul maintained that one of the greatest achievements of French culture was its success in teaching women the art of entertaining guests. He had taken great pains with his daughter's education in that respect. So that she had been already an accomplished hostess at sixteen. Since conversation was her father's chief delight in life, she got plenty of practice in the years that intervened. That was why she was now able to look so composed, even while her heart fluttered because of the young man's presence.

When the meal got under way, she began to examine him shyly. She realized at once that he was entirely different from all the revolutionaries that came to their house in Paris. All those other men did not seem at all dangerous; not even a man with such a reputation for violence as the Russian Bakunin. On the contrary, she found them pathetic, especially when they boasted of their sufferings. This young man's very presence in the room was frightening in some mysterious way. Even when his face lit up in a smile he still looked dangerous.

Everything he did fascinated her. Yet he did most outrageous things. He interrupted the conversation of the older men whenever he felt inclined. He would stop speaking suddenly and stare at the ceiling. His gestures were brusque. A sudden movement of his muscular body would put his clothes out of shape, as if a savage impulse in him sought to tear off their constraint.

What interested her most was the fact that he completely dominated the two other men. She had never before seen her father submit to the power of another man's personality.

When he finally spoke to her, her composure vanished and she had to lean far back out of the lamp-light, in order to hide her blushes.

"I remember you," he said.

As she bowed in answer to his remark, she felt thrilled by the tenderness of his voice. When speaking to the others, his voice sounded harsh. Now it was tender.

"I hope I didn't frighten you that day," he continued.

"Not in the least," she said.

"You must have thought I was a disgusting fellow," he said, "when you saw me stagger into your kitchen, with blood streaming down my face and a revolver in my hand."

"Disgusting?" said Lettice seriously. "Why should I think so?"

Instead of answering her, he turned away suddenly, looked at the ceiling for a few moments and then spoke to Raoul. If

another person had behaved like that towards her, she would have felt extremely hurt. Yet his rudeness merely increased the peculiar feeling of elation that his presence inspired in her. Later, when he again spoke to her, although twenty minutes had passed, she was unaware of any interruption to their conversation.

"Your voice is like music," he whispered, bending close to her. "Do all French women speak like you?"

"But I am not French," Lettice said. "I was merely born in France. I am Irish."

He laughed, looking her straight in the eyes.

"Of course," he said, "you couldn't be anything else with that light in your eyes. It was your French accent that led me astray. I had an American accent myself when I came home."

"Were you long in America?" Lettice said.

"Five years," he said. "I went to look for gold in Nevada and California."

"Did you find any?" said Lettice.

"Enough for my purpose, I hope," he said.

"I have heard that California is beautiful," said Lettice.

He stared at her in silence for a little while.

"Beautiful?" he said at length. "Cape Horn is beautiful. I went from San Francisco around Cape Horn on a sailing ship, when I was coming back to Ireland. We ran into icebergs. Then there was a storm that lasted three weeks. Eight men of the crew were killed. We had only a foremast left on our ship. Do you like the sea?"

"Yes," said Lettice.

"When the fine weather comes," he said, "I'll take you sailing in my boat. I must go now."

Lettice and Raoul went into the living-room after the two guests had gone. Lettice threw herself down in a corner of the sofa and put her hands behind her neck. Raoul paced the floor. They were silent for some time. Then he halted in front of his daughter and stared at her.

"What do you think of O'Dwyer?" he said.

"Why do you ask, Father?" Lettice said.

"Because I value your opinion," Raoul said. "I have made an important decision. I want to know what you think of him, simply because you are less decadent than I am. You are closer to the earth, with a clearer understanding of a primitive creature like O'Dwyer."

"Primitive?" said Lettice. "I don't think him at all primitive. He gives that impression superficially, simply because he is

unique, judged by our standards. I mean that he creates his own world and his own laws."

"Very good," said Raoul, touching his beard. "I am delighted to hear you say that."

"He sees beauty only in danger," Lettice said.

"How did you arrive at that conclusion?" Raoul said.

"I asked him if he thought California beautiful," Lettice said, "and he looked astonished, as if the word 'beautiful' were unknown to him until that moment. Then he said that Cape Horn was beautiful, simply because his ship nearly foundered there in a storm."

"Excellent," said Raoul. "Danger is to him what tragedy is to a poet, the ultimate beauty. You have convinced me that I was right in thinking that he is a born leader of men."

His expression, which ordinarily looked cynical, now became humble and even tender.

"Tell me, Lettice," he said, "if you are angry with me for bringing you to Manister."

"I couldn't possibly be angry with you, Father," Lettice said. "I love you."

"Yes, yes, child," Raoul said irritably, as he began to pace the floor once more. "In spite of that, you could regret being forced to live in this dreary and remote village."

"I'm very happy here," said Lettice.

"I've reached an age at which the intelligent man eschews the external world as much as possible," Raoul said, "but you are a flower opening its petals to the beautiful warmth of emotional life. I've had qualms of conscience about dragging you to this barbarous place."

"You needn't have," said Lettice passionately. "Not in the least. I feel that I'm taking part in life for the first time, since coming to Manister. Life in Paris was artificial, in spite of its exquisite culture. It was foreign to me. It was like staring at life through the window of a very expensive shop. Here I feel among my own people. I walk on my own earth and breathe my own air."

Raoul halted again and stared at her anxiously from a distance.

"Lettice," he said, "I have decided to join in this struggle against the landlords."

"How wonderful!" Lettice cried, sitting forward on the sofa and clasping her hands like a delighted child. "To free humble people from oppression is the most noble of all tasks."

"I can hardly claim that sort of nobility," Raoul said. "One must be honest with one's own conscience, in order to maintain

clarity of thought. It is terrible to have lost faith. It is really terrible to be an educated man in our age of transition. For thousands of years, the human intellect had remained at the same level, in so far as knowledge of the universe was concerned. Then suddenly, in this astounding century of ours, fantastic discoveries are made. The steam engine, the internal combustion machine, the telegraph, the telephone and other startling innovations radically change our relation to the earth and to universal space. To-morrow, even more fantastic inventions will appear. The whole structure of our morality has come toppling about our ears as a result of this new knowledge. Our gods, who seemed omnipotent yesterday, are to-day no better than abandoned scarecrows. To-day, any street urchin with a loaded pistol can make thunder like Jove. We are all at a loss, all of us who are capable of abstract thought, overwhelmed by the avalanche of scientific discoveries. While we hysterically re-examine the idea of God, with the object of making it conform to our changed conception of the universe, our moral conscience flounders about in the vacuum created by our genius. We cry out desperately for authority, even while we smash all authority. Poor suffering humanity can endure just so much iconoclasm and anarchy. Then reason cracks. Or else, one returns to the womb for protection. What womb? The earth is the common womb of all humanity. I have returned to the womb of my ancestors. It is the land I seek and not the people. I am afraid and I seek refuge in the earth, just as a sick man climbs into his bed and draws the blankets up about his ears."

He came over to Lettice and took her by the hand.

"Your aunt has taken me to task several times about you," he said. "You see, this annuity that I have expires with me. I have saved nothing. If anything should happen to me . . ."

"Please, don't talk about money," Lettice interrupted. "It is completely unimportant."

Raoul sat down beside her.

"I've educated you very badly," he said. "You are just as irresponsible as I am."

"You have taught me how to think and how to appreciate beauty," said Lettice. "That is all that is necessary for happiness."

"Poor Lizzie!" Raoul said. "I feel criminal about getting her involved in what must appear utterly obscene to her. Now we must go to bed. I'm very tired."

He yawned, got to his feet and stretched his arms above his head. Then he suddenly got excited once more.

"Amazing fellow, that priest," he cried, as he stared at the

floor with his fingers to his beard. "I envy him. He was a very normal parish priest until he became involved by accident in a stupid insurrection twelve years ago. His brother, a colonel in the American army, came to Ireland after the Civil War, in order to take part in the insurrection. Father Kelly was parish priest of the district where his brother, the colonel, was about to attack a British military barracks. He went out to the assembly point of the insurgents, trying to persuade his brother to abandon the hopeless enterprise. While the two brothers were arguing passionately, the British carried out a surprise attack on the insurgent camp. The insurgents fled. Father Kelly went with them. As soon as the firing started, he told me, he forgot that he was a priest and opposed to rebellion against authority on moral grounds. He only knew that the same blood flowed through his veins as through those of his brother and of the other insurgents. When the colonel was killed in a raid, Father Francis took command of what troops remained. Finally, he was captured and pardoned because of his cloth. His superiors deprived him of his parish and of the right to administer the sacraments. He has remained fixed ever since in that single act of revolt. He can neither advance beyond it, nor regain the state of mind that preceded it. He wanders about the country like a lost soul, trying to rouse the people to a repetition of his own tragedy. It really was a tragedy and yet I envy him his fixity of thought."

"No, Father," Lettice said gently, as she got to her feet. "It was not a tragedy. He learned to love the people that day when the British attacked the insurgent camp."

Raoul stared at her in surprise.

"And O'Dwyer?" he said after a long pause. "Do you think he, too, loves the people?"

"I am certain of it," Lettice said.

Raoul sighed deeply and said in a dejected tone:

"How wonderful it must be to feel noble!"

Lettice threw her arms impulsively about his neck and whispered:

"To me, everything you do and everything you say is noble and beautiful."

Raoul kissed her and said tenderly:

"Thank you, child. You are the apple of my eye."

After she had got into bed and put out the light, she lay awake for a long time in excited thought. In the darkness, with the soft music of the sea coming in a constant rhythm through the open window, she felt wonderfully happy. It was like being taken

in a dream to an enchanted place and waiting for the secret of the enchantment to be disclosed.

All that she had hitherto found beautiful in life now appeared to have been merely a prelude to this passionate ecstasy of waiting, as each urgent beat of her heart brought life closer with the key of love.

CHAPTER VIII

FENTON POURED WHISKY INTO his glass, drank eagerly and shuddered. He had drunk a good deal since finishing his lunch an hour previously. He was now quite tipsy without being at all aware of it. He felt even more depressed than before he began to drink. The whisky made him brood still more feverishly on Butcher's visit of the previous night and the unpleasant incident at Sram during the forenoon.

He sat perfectly still in an old leather-covered armchair by the window of his parlour, hoping that this last drink would have the desired effect of putting his mind at ease. Nothing of the sort happened. Irritated by his continued failure, he began to tap the arm of the chair nervously with the tips of his fingers. Then he suddenly took away his fingers and stared at the chair arm with a grimace of disgust. The used leather was torn. His fingers had come in contact with the horsehair stuffing. It was like touching something dead and corrupt. He jumped to his feet and glanced around the room, at the shabby carpet, at the dirty pieces of furniture, at the spider's web in a corner of the ceiling. In his present mood, the condition of the room appeared degrading to him.

"Cursed place!" he cried aloud. "It's killing me."

Pulling at the collar of his uniform, to relieve the shortness of breath caused by his fit of temper, he put his head out the window and breathed deeply. The Royal Hotel, in which he had rooms, gave directly on to the river that flowed through the town of Clash. To the right, a stone bridge of considerable beauty spanned the river. Two women were quarrelling at the very centre of the bridge, indifferent to a heavy shower of rain that had just begun to fall. One of the women was enormously fat. She had a basket of fish poised on her head, above a coiled white cloth. With her bare arms stretched out to their full length, to defend herself against attack as well as to preserve the balance of her load, she circled slowly back and forth with the grace of a

juggler. A thin woman with bedraggled hair, dressed in a skimpy black shawl, opposed the fat one. The thin woman, uttering fierce cries like a robbed bird, made sudden attacks, now from one direction, now from another, with bowed head, always falling short of her objective. Except for the two women and a solitary red cart, that rumbled over the cobblestones on the far side of the bridge behind a black horse, there was nobody in movement. Groups of loafers, in spite of the rain, leaned against the houses and against the walls of the river. The town square opened off the far side of the bridge. The principal shops and public buildings were there. The largest of them, formerly the Customs House, had collapsed. All that remained of it was a solitary chimney, rising gaunt and naked from the great heap of rubble, tipped slightly to one side at the very top, like the stripped skeleton of a giraffe. In the centre of the square there was a marble block, newly erected, inscribed with gold lettering, surmounted by the statue of an English general on horse-back. The head and left arm of the general had fallen. He had a drawn sword in his right hand, raised high above his headless trunk in grotesque belligerence. To the left, where the river debouched into the sea, the atmosphere of decay was still more in evidence. A row of buildings, which looked foreign owing to their age and imposing structure, lay completely in ruins along the river wall. They had been warehouses when Clash traded with Imperial Spain, at the height of the St. George family's feudal power. Smoke rose from one of these ruined warehouses. Ragged clothes were hung out on a string across a gap in the upper part of the front wall. Evicted tenants from the countryside had taken shelter there.

Looking at this scene, which he had grown to hate intensely, Fenton's ill temper turned to apathy. He withdrew from the window, sighed and threw himself once more into the chair. He grasped the arms, no longer sensitive to contact with the foul stuffing that lay exposed. He closed his eyes, let his head loll to one side and drew in a deep breath. For a moment, as he exhaled slowly, he had the feeling of being pleasantly tired and sleepy. This pleasant feeling ended abruptly and he jumped to his feet in a state of panic. His mind had recalled with devilish clarity, in that instant of pleasant relaxation, his shameful experience at the hamlet of Sram.

"I must go to her," he cried aloud. "Otherwise I'll go mad."

Relieved by having decided on a course of action, he quickly regained control of himself. He carefully brushed his hair and his uniform, put a clove in his mouth to neutralize the smell of

alcohol, locked the whisky in the cupboard and went downstairs. His eyes were blurred and his legs felt somewhat unsteady, but his handsome face gave no sign of the commotion within him. If anything, he looked more cold and contemptuous than usual.

While he waited downstairs for his horse to be brought around, he was accosted by two men of his acquaintance. One of them was a barrister called James Stagg. The other was Fintan Corbett, owner and editor of the local government newspaper. Both of these men were noted in the district for their drunken and lascivious practices. Stagg was still young and attractive, with laughing blue eyes and a splendid body. Corbett was short and corpulent, with a repulsive face. When they halted before Fenton in the hall and invited him hilariously to drink with them, the District Inspector saluted coldly and stepped aside to let them pass. He had scrupulously avoided the company of the more dissolute among the supporters of the British Government since his arrival in Clash. He knew very well that failure to follow that rule was fatal for English officials in Ireland.

Seeing that Fenton was intent on snubbing their friendly approaches, Stagg and Corbett became hostile.

"Look here, Fenton," Corbett said, "you're not in a position to lord it over anybody."

"Damned if he is," Stagg said.

"As editor of the *Clash Sentinel*," Corbett said, "I hold you in the hollow of my hand."

"And that's putting it mildly," Stagg said.

"This morning's affair at Sram . . ." Corbett continued.

"Now run along, you two," Fenton interrupted haughtily.

"I don't like your attitude, Fenton," said Stagg. "It's not that I want your company. Far from it. It's simply that I refuse to take insults from an Englishman."

Stagg was an Englishman himself, having come to Ireland as a child. In his sober moments, which were not frequent, he was a loyal subject of the Queen. In drink, however, he became perverse and invariably abused his own race.

"I can break you like that," Corbett said in a vindictive tone, as he slowly closed his small fist before Fenton's mouth. "You bungled the Manister outrage. Even the town dogs know the criminal, yet you can't lay hands on him."

"True and even too true," said Stagg.

"There was a leading article in *The Times*," Corbett continued, "asking why there were no arrests in Manister. I'll give you the answer. Fear, sir, is the answer. We have a coward in charge of our Constabulary."

"Enough of that," Fenton snapped, losing his self-control. "Run along at once, or you'll regret your insolence."

"Indeed!" cried Stagg, assuming a belligerent pose. "Is the hero of Sram threatening us with violence?"

"Sram will go down in history," said Corbett, raising his voice, "as the scene of a most gross insult to the honour of Her Majesty's forces. The humble village of Sram, hitherto the most obscure hamlet in our county, if not in the whole world . . ."

"I'm giving you a last warning, Corbett," cried Fenton.

"Take care, Fenton," Stagg shouted. "I don't like threats. You're behaving like a cad."

Corbett, who had been pushed to the rear by the gesticulating Stagg, now plunged forward and tapped Fenton sharply on the uniform with his knuckles.

"Can you deny having struck an old man?" he shouted. "A feeble old man in his dotage. One word from me in the *Sentinel* and you are a ruined man. I'm read in influential quarters."

One of the hotel servants, a powerful man with prominent upper teeth, now seized Corbett by both arms from behind and rushed him smartly off towards the bar.

"A feeble old man in his dotage," Corbett shouted furiously as he was being frog-marched, with his feet barely touching the ground. "You struck him on the top of his head with your whip-handle."

"Hey! You!" cried Stagg, dashing after the servant. "Let go my friend, you insolent dolt."

With a drunken shout of glee, he thrust out his foot and tripped the fellow who frog-marched Corbett. Both Corbett and the servant rolled to the floor. A group of English commercial travellers, attracted by the commotion, came from the bar at that moment. Seeing Corbett on the floor beneath the hotel servant, they mistook the nature of the struggle. They came to grips with the servant before the fellow was able to explain. Stagg now took sides with the man he had tripped. He began to address the commercial travellers in most offensive language.

"You are a gang of ruffians," he cried, "spreading like a rash over the world, carriers of shoddy goods and vulgarity. You are microbes, bearing the foul disease of capitalism. You are the personal enemies of good taste."

Fenton's horse having arrived, he mounted the animal and rode away in haste, in order to escape from this unfortunate adventure. The rain had now ceased, leaving the ground in a very muddy state. As he crossed the bridge, he rode close to the two women that had been quarrelling. They were now seated on

the pavement, with the basket between them, sharing the fish that had been the cause of their struggle. The horse threw mud on them as he passed close to the pavement. One of them cursed him with vigour. This slight incident, coming immediately after the scandalous scene at the hotel, made him lash his horse at a breakneck gallop through the town, much to the astonishment of those who chanced to recognise him. He did not draw rein until he had gone half a mile along the Manister road. After a brief spell he again spurred the animal, seeking escape from his thoughts in violent movement. Both the horse and himself were perspiring heavily when they reached the police barracks at Manister.

He inspected the garrison hurriedly, in order to give his journey the appearance of a routine visit. Then he rode on to Manister House. He now let the tired horse walk slowly up the rising ground. He sat with his head drooping, in a melancholy stupor, rolling from side to side in the saddle.

Six weeks had passed since he was last in the demesne. The trees on either side of the smooth drive were now in full leaf. They made a closed arch with their branches over the road.

Everything was very different from that other day. Now there was no feeling of exaltation in the air. The earth no longer gave forth a disturbing scent. The sky had remained overcast after the rain. It looked sinister. A sharp wind came whispering down from the hills.

CHAPTER IX

BARBARA STOOD BY A BAY WINDOW that gave on to the lawn. With her head turned a little to one side, she listened in passionate absorption to a song that came from the direction of the stables. She was dressed in black. She did not turn round at once when the butler announced Fenton's entrance.

Agitated by the sensual effect that her presence always had on him, Fenton almost tripped over the carpet several times as he marched down the drawing-room.

"Did Stapleton tell you that Neville is away?" Barbara said in a very casual tone as he approached.

"I already knew," Fenton said as he bowed over her hand.

"Oh!" Barbara said, turning her eyes once more in the direction of the stables.

"Captain Butcher called on me last night," Fenton said.

"Do sit down," Barbara said without looking at him.

Sobered by the sharp gallop from Clash, the District Inspector now felt acutely sorry that he had come.

"What on earth led me to suppose that she would be sympathetic?" he asked himself. "I know she despises me."

In fact, Barbara did not seem inclined to pay any further attention to her guest after her first few bored remarks. She continued listening to the song in unconcealed rapture. The silence became so painful for Fenton that he finally asked her the identity of the singer, simply in order to make conversation. Barbara responded at once.

"It's Andrew Fitzgerald, the new groom," she said, taking a chair opposite Fenton and smiling radiantly. "His voice has a rare quality. Don't you think so?"

Fenton pretended to listen to the song for a few moments with attention. It was a Gaelic love-song, rendered with passion in a tenor voice. He felt that it lacked any of the rare quality that Barbara professed to find in it.

"He's very good," he said politely. "Fitzgerald, did you say?"

"He came last week to take Murphy's place," Barbara said. "Poor Murphy got frightened during the attack on my husband. He has run away. It seems that one of the bullets grazed his neck and he couldn't sleep as a result. Then last week he saw Michael O'Dwyer, whom everybody says is the culprit, down at the pier. That was too much for him. He bolted that night."

The butler came into the room with wine and whisky on a tray, just as the groom reached the climax of his song. As he took some whisky, Fenton noted with displeasure that Barbara made no attempt to conceal from the butler her passionate absorption in the groom's wild cry of love.

"I hope you forgive my coming," Fenton said after the butler had gone.

Barbara did not reply for a few moments. She seemed to be recovering slowly from the hypnotic effects of the song that had just ended. She shuddered slightly before turning to Fenton.

"I'm glad you came," she said without feeling. "You say Neville came to see you last night. Did he, by any chance, tell you where he was going?"

"Not exactly," Fenton said in surprise.

Barbara laughed and toyed with her necklace.

"You must think it very odd that I should ask such a question," she said gaily, "but that is how things are in this house lately. Neville has become most secretive. He trusts nobody. Indeed, I feel that his bloodhound is the only creature in which he has any

confidence. Life has become insufferable. It really has. I hope you don't think it disloyal of me to say such things."

"Not in the least," Fenton said.

"If only the criminal were caught and brought to justice," Barbara continued, "we might have peace."

"It's very difficult," Fenton said, crossing his legs. "We have no evidence. If we attempted to secure a conviction and failed, especially in view of the popular ferment, there might be a grave danger of making the man a martyr and a hero. The Government very definitely does not want to provide the rebels with any more martyrs than it can possibly help."

"It all sounds insane," Barbara said.

"Very unpleasant business, I admit," Fenton said.

"Neville is planning something," Barbara said. "He always reacts violently when attacked."

"Your husband has gone to Dublin," Fenton said in a sombre tone.

"Oh!" said Barbara. "To Dublin? Is it to see Lord Mongooole about those tenants that are to be evicted?"

"The evictions are possibly one of the reasons that took him to Dublin," said Fenton, "but not the main reason. He called on me last night about a much more serious matter."

Barbara wrinkled her forehead and examined Fenton's face critically.

"You have something unpleasant to say," she said in a tone of annoyance.

"There are many things I want to tell you," Fenton said.

"Some of them, no doubt, you may find unpleasant. Others, I am bold enough to hope, might not be altogether . . ."

He broke off in confusion, blushing to the roots of his hair.

"Sometimes I have the feeling that I am living in a lunatic asylum," Barbara said. "It really is beastly, living in a state of permanent fear, among people by whom one is permanently hated. Why can't we ever behave decently towards the Irish? We have tortured this charming and talented people for hundreds of years. It's outrageous."

"I profoundly disagree," Fenton said passionately.

Barbara looked at him with disgust.

"How odd!" she said.

"I loathe both the country and the people," Fenton said with remarkable intensity. "I'd give a great deal to be away from here. Unfortunately, I'm a poor man. I can't afford to resign."

He flushed, looked at Barbara suddenly and then drank all the whisky in his glass.

"How very odd!" Barbara said. "I felt certain that you were a sensitive person."

"The trouble is that I'm too sensitive," Fenton said in an injured tone.

"Not in the way I understand the word," Barbara said contemptuously.

Fenton became truculent as the whisky made him intoxicated once more.

"It's because I am sensitive beyond the ordinary," he said, "that I suffer so much from having to live here. The others simply drink and gamble. They stupefy themselves. However, I didn't come here to talk of that sort of thing. I wanted to tell you . . ."

"I feel sure that I'm not going to like what you have to say," Barbara interrupted. "I've changed my mind lately about many things. May I have some sherry?"

When he rose, Fenton was shocked to discover that he was completely drunk. He had considerable difficulty in getting Barbara her wine. Yet he refilled his own glass before returning to his seat.

"When I met you first," Barbara said after tasting the sherry, "I had an idea that you were sensitive to injustice, that it revolted you and that you held yourself apart for that reason, realising that you were being forced to live in a lie. Apparently I was wrong. You evidently have no sympathy with those who suffer injustice."

Fenton tried to retort, but failed to find anything suitable. He put his fingers inside the collar of his uniform and tugged nervously several times, trying to relieve the developing constriction at the base of his throat. Then he suddenly thought of a retort.

"Last time I was here," he cried in a tone of indignation, "you yourself said that you found the people stupid and cruel."

"Surely not," Barbara said. "Even then, my views had already begun to change."

"I distinctly remember your saying so," Fenton said in a tone of mean triumph.

"Oh! I remember now," Barbara said. "I was referring to Major Fitzwilliam and the others. It's quite true that the local gentry bore me. They bore me terribly. The people to whom I now refer are those whom the parson loves to call 'the natives.' He says it in such a peculiar way, barely opening his lips, as if they were too indecent for mention in polite society."

"You surprise me," Fenton said.

"Neville's attitude towards them is slightly different," Barbara

continued. "He thinks of them as domestic animals, some good for being soldiers, others for various kinds of manual labour."

"You surprise me very much," Fenton said.

"I hoped that I wouldn't surprise you," Barbara said, "when I met you first. You seemed so different from the others. I thought we might become friends. I was very lonely and . . ."

"I, too, am very lonely," Fenton interrupted in a tone of wild excitement. "I can't tell you how desperately lonely I am."

He sat forward to the edge of his chair and began to tremble.

"Don't let anything I said just now make any difference to our relationship," he pleaded. "I'm not quite myself. Indeed, for some time now, I have been far from normal."

His handsome face had suddenly become haggard. His eyes, instead of being shrewd and watchful, had become soft and appealing. The change had an unpleasing effect on his countenance. When it wore the mask of stern and contemptuous indifference, with which the imperial Englishman tries to command the respect of less disciplined races, his face was attractive. Without that mask, it was the face of a rather common man in pain.

"I shock you," Barbara said, looking him straight in the eyes.

"That is untrue," Fenton said. "Everything you do and everything you say is a source of passionate excitement for me. To me you are . . ."

"I do shock you," Barbara said, "because you are a conventional person."

"That is quite untrue," Fenton asserted.

"I was never conventional," Barbara said. "From childhood I have been attracted towards whatever was forbidden. I was an orphan, you see, embittered by the ill-treatment of those placed in charge of me. I went on the stage when I came of age, even though I disliked the theatre and had no talent for acting, simply in order to shock people of my class, who looked upon an actress as a disreputable character. Then I married an Irishman who was hopelessly in debt, a gambler, a drunkard and a duellist. That was still more shocking. We lived for seven glorious years in disreputable happiness at Monte Carlo, at Paris, at London, at Dublin, at Baden. Then money became impossible to find. My beautiful Irishman deliberately drank himself to death. Afterwards, I married Neville simply in order to get a home. You see, Mr. Fenton, that I am a very shocking woman and completely unashamed."

With a quick twist of her wrist, like a man, she emptied her glass.

"Nothing you could say," Fenton said earnestly, "could

possibly make any difference to my feelings towards you. When a man feels in the way I do, all is understood. On a certain plane of emotion, there is nothing to condemn."

He had become very agitated while he was speaking. Then he got to his feet unsteadily and took a pace towards her.

"Sit down and compose yourself," Barbara said sharply.

"It's too late now," Fenton said thickly.

"Sit down, Mr. Fenton," Barbara said. "I command you."

"I came to talk to you about something else," Fenton said. "but this must come off my chest first of all."

"Sit down," Barbara said.

"I must speak of this, too," said Fenton, "because the other affair would never have arisen, were it not for this."

"We are not alone in the house," Barbara said angrily. "Sit down at once, or I must ask you to leave."

Fenton brought his heels together with difficulty. Then he bowed abruptly, sat down and stared at the floor, with his palms joined between his knees.

"Even the most timid man can be ruthless," he said, talking at random and in a subdued tone. "When a certain point is reached, it is easier to be ruthless than the contrary. It's odd how a man is thrust suddenly out of obscurity into a situation where desperate and dramatic decisions have to be made. For twelve years I led a humdrum life. You may think I did beastly things even then. Now and again, I admit, there were things that might appear shameful. Police work is like that. However, it was all according to regulations. This morning, however, I overstepped the mark. I did something really frightful. I went with ten constables to carry out an eviction at a place called Sram, the other side of Clash. The tenants to be evicted lived in a little cabin, that stood apart on a knoll above the seashore. A desolate place, really, unfit for human beings. The thatch was so old that grass and little flowers were sprouting from it. In the yard and in the tiny paddock at the back of the hut there were tall weeds. The door was closed. The two windows, ever so small, were covered with boards. The whole thing was like an abandoned doll's house. It belonged to an old couple, entirely destitute, the children all gone to America. You know how children behave in this country among the peasants. They are entirely bereft of filial affection. In any case, I had to evict the old couple and put them in the work-house. The wife, white-haired and very tall, a decent-looking old person, stood among the village people. She seemed to watch the whole affair with complete detachment. The old man stayed within the cabin, refusing to surrender possession. I ordered the

crowbar fellows to advance and knock down the walls. It took only a few blows here and there. Down they came. Just dry mud, of course. It collapsed like a house of cards. There was the old man, on his hearthstone, barefooted, bareheaded, with a stick in his hand. It really was a pathetic sight. It's impossible to become hardened to that sort of thing. What struck me especially was the smoke-blackened wall of the chimney place, a wisp of smoke rising from some peat ashes on the hearth and the look of shame on the old man's face. It's odd, but I'm ready to swear that it was shame he felt. He was ashamed of being exposed that way to the outside world, after the walls fell. It was just like being caught naked. He saw me sitting my horse outside in the road and uttered a howl of rage. Babbled and waving his stick, he made for me through the rubble. Nobody attempted to stop him, neither the constables nor the crowbar men whom he passed. He looked so odd, I suppose, with his bald skull like that of a corpse, completely devoid of flesh. Men are baffled, no matter how well trained, by that sort of thing. You really don't ever get used to it, no matter how callous you may think you are. He came at me, muttering some nonsense. There was froth at his lips. Then I lost control and struck at him with my whip. He fell instantly. Since then I have kept asking myself whether I really hit him or whether he fell at that moment in a fit. At any rate, the terrible fact is that I *wanted* to strike him. That is the terrible truth, so it doesn't really matter whether it was a fit or my whip that made him fall. I *wanted* to strike that old man. I *hated* him terribly."

As he came to the end of his strange recital, he raised his eyes and looked at Barbara in forlorn appeal. She returned his glance with cruel compósure.

"You didn't come here to tell me about striking an old man," she said.

Fenton made an effort to straighten himself. He succeeded to some extent in regaining his usual dignity. His lower lip, however, was now trembling. Failure to win her sympathy was a great blow to him.

"I told you about the old man," he said in a low voice, "simply to explain my condition."

"You really came to talk about Neville's visit last night," Barbara said. "Didn't you?"

"If I were my normal self," Fenton said, "your husband's visit would not have disturbed me in the least. Alas! I've not been my normal self since I was here last. I've been tortured night and day by the thought that I might become an accomplice in a . . ."

He interrupted himself and stared at Barbara. His eyes looked frightened.

"Excuse me," he muttered, "for talking at random."

"So that's what it is," Barbara said.

"Don't let us talk about it," Fenton said. "What would be the use?"

"He let you ponder over some wicked suggestion all this time," Barbara said. "For six whole weeks. What a perfect devil! He let you torture yourself with indecision and qualms of conscience."

"Please," Fenton said. "It's quite useless now. It would be merely flogging a dead horse."

"Was it murder?" Barbara whispered

"Murder?" Fenton cried in horror.

Barbara shrugged her shoulders.

"You have no right to say that," Fenton cried, jumping to his feet.

"Sit down and tell me what he wants you to do," Barbara said quietly.

"Forget all I have said until now," Fenton cried in a piteous tone. "All of it. I only want you to know that I am madly in love with you. That is really what I came to tell you, even though I didn't admit it to myself. Yes, that is truly why I came. At thirty-six a man is not yet too old for a fresh start in life. You, too, are unhappy. Then, in God's name, why should one sin and that only half committed make any difference to us? There are vast opportunities in America. Every other day one hears of fabulous fortunes being made in the Nevada mines. I can only offer you the abject devotion of . . ."

"Sit down and tell me about this sinful thing," Barbara interrupted.

Fenton started violently. Then he touched his heels, bowed and sat down. Her brutal dismissal of his proposal had again sobered him. Now he felt angry with her.

"Why did you agree to obey him, if what he proposes is so sinful?" she continued.

"Did I say sinful?" Fenton said, in a sneering tone. "I understood myself to have used the word dishonourable."

"Have it your own way," Barbara said. "Why did you submit?"

"I was a fool to have come here," Fenton said.

"Neville tries to get everybody into his power," Barbara said. "It's a mania with him. I have watched him at it for three years. At first it was fascinating to watch him at his tricks. He invariably begins by making friends with his intended victim. He probes for the man's weakness, like a butcher feeling under the fur of an

animal for the jugular vein. When he finds the weakness, he strikes at it without mercy. If there is no weakness, he cultivates one. He seems to take an especial delight in destroying weaklings. It was only when he had the effrontery to use me as a bait that I ceased to be amused."

"Then you know everything," Fenton cried arrogantly.

"Tell me what he wants now," Barbara said.

"Why should you be sympathetic?" Fenton said. "After all, you are his wife."

"Why are you afraid to speak?" Barbara said.

"I don't blame you in the least," Fenton said. "You gave me no encouragement. You can't be held responsible for your beauty."

"I might be able to help you," Barbara said.

Although her expression did not change, her voice became gentle as she made this last statement. Fenton responded at once to this encouragement. His bitter mood left him. He covered his face with his left hand.

"I'd rather not talk about it," he said. "I must make my own decisions."

"Then why did you come here?" Barbara said angrily.

"I came because I felt myself going mad," Fenton said, "and you were the only one I knew that might be sympathetic. A few kind words . . ."

"How could I sympathise with you unless you confide in me?" Barbara said.

"It's too late now," Fenton said. "I gave him the necessary documents last night. In his presence it was impossible to deny him. Now it seems utterly silly that I should have considered myself under an obligation to him, simply because I am dishonourably in love with his wife. Yet at that time . . ."

He took his hand from in front of his face, looked at Barbara and said:

"How frightful! I've been drinking."

"You are quite right," Barbara said. "I could do nothing to help you, because I despise cowards. I have more sympathy with a monster like Neville than with a coward. If I were a man and I had Neville's passions, I'd behave exactly as he does. His passion is to possess land. He would commit any crime to possess it. He allows nothing to stand in his way. I understand passion. I am myself a passionate woman."

She threw back her head, looked at the ceiling and said dreamily:

"My passion is not to possess land, or to scavenge for gold."

Fenton got to his feet and walked over to the table on which the whisky lay. He began to fill his glass.

"You mustn't take any more whisky," Barbara said, coming over to him.

He continued to pour the whisky.

"It doesn't help to drug yourself," she said, putting her hand on his arm.

Fenton made a sound in his throat. It was like a sob. He put down the decanter hurriedly. He stood absolutely still for several moments. Then he began to tremble. He turned towards her. With his head bowed, he groped at her bosom. He passed his hands hither and thither lightly, like a man trying to identify an object by means of touch.

"You torture me," he said in a whisper.

Then he made another sound in his throat like a sob, threw his arms about her waist, reached forward and sought her lips.

"Ugh!" Barbara exclaimed in disgust.

She had stood motionless and unresisting until he sought to kiss her. Then she struck him on both ears with her open palms, with great force. He was stunned by the double blow. He would have fallen if she had not caught him. She led his sagging body back to his chair. There she seated him. She held him upright for a little while, until he regained his strength.

"I'm sorry I had to do that," she said quietly, "but I loathe being approached by a drunken man."

"I owe you an abject apology, Mrs. Butcher," Fenton said with grave dignity.

Barbara put her hand on his shoulder and restrained him as he tried to rise.

"I have something to tell you," she said. "I don't want you to leave here with the idea that I am a heartless creature."

Fenton nodded.

"I'm not the sort of woman to whom a man can come for sympathy," she continued. "Furthermore, I have reached the point where a woman begins to be afraid of getting old. Fear of oncoming age brings out whatever is evil in a woman like me. I have lit my third fire. I tell you this frankly, because it is best that you should have no further illusions."

"Your third fire?" Fenton said.

"Don't you know the local superstition?" Barbara said.

"I'm afraid not," said Fenton.

"The peasants say that a childless woman," Barbara said, "when she seeks her third man, lights a fire in her heart that devours everything. My third fire is already lit, Mr. Fenton. I

have thrown everything on to it. I have nothing left. Neither pity, nor kindness, nor love. Have I made myself perfectly clear?"

Fenton got to his feet slowly and pulled at his uniform.

"If I may, Mrs. Butcher," he said, bowing with ceremony, "I would like to take my leave."

"Did you ride or drive?" Barbara said coldly as she walked to the door with him.

"I rode," Fenton said. "Please accept my most humble apologies for having taken up so much of your time."

She walked very erect, slightly in front of Fenton and to one side. Her full bosom rose with each forward movement of her body, like a swan breasting water in amorous pursuit.

Fenton glanced towards her once as they crossed the floor. Then he shuddered, drew in a deep breath, threw back his shoulders and tried to brace himself against the tragedy of his passion.

"Please don't accompany me further," he said as they entered the hall.

"I insist," Barbara said.

Fitzgerald, the new groom, brought Fenton's horse to the hall door. He was a tall, lean man of thirty-two. He had narrow hips, wide shoulders and sombre dark eyes that were not without beauty. He had recently been discharged from a cavalry regiment, on completion of service, after having fought both in India and Africa. His countenance had the cruel assurance that comes from drawing enemy blood on the battle-field. His broad horseman's hand, as hard as metal, helped Fenton into the saddle. Then he walked over and stood beside Barbara on the bottom step before the door.

Fenton turned in the saddle and saluted as he rode away. Darkness descended on his soul, as he caught a hurried glimpse of Barbara, standing on the bottom step beside the groom.

CHAPTER X

NIGHT HAD LONG SINCE FALLEN. Yet birds warbled drowsily, seduced from sleep by the first voluptuous heat of summer. The moon was full. Its ghostly radiance made a shimmering white lane across the smooth surface of the ocean, to the far horizon, like a road from earth to heaven. There was a feeling of intense rapture in the air.

Julia McNamara was indifferent to the night's tender beauty, as she waited for Michael O'Dwyer in the grassy lane that ran across the base of the peninsula, south of Raoul St. George's land. She walked back and forth like a caged animal, between the high stone fences that bounded the lane. Her fists were pressed hard against her sides. The skirt of her orange dress swayed rhythmically to and fro, sweeping the grass like a broom. A black shawl was thrown loosely about her arms and shoulders. A Spanish comb glistened in the moonlight above the coil of her jet black hair.

Now in her twenty-third year, she had the reputation of being the most beautiful woman in the district. She certainly had a magnificent carriage. The movement of her tall and slender body was like a subtle dance. The shining darkness of her hair, her flashing blue eyes, the immaculate whiteness of her arched neck and the passionate music of her voice all had the quality of beauty. Yet her loveliness was marred to a certain extent by the almost lunatic intensity of her expression. At one time she had entered a convent with the intention of becoming a nun. She was sent home after a few months, owing to an illness brought on by mystical exaltation. She used to faint in chapel after receiving the Blessed Eucharist. She was the daughter of Bartly McNamara, the shopkeeper that spat at the District Inspector on the day of the ambush.

She halted now and again to look over the top of the fence towards Manister Lodge, which stood out clear against the eastern horizon in the brilliant moonlight. It was about five hundred yards from where she stood, within a ring of trees, beyond the upward-sloping flat fields. The moonlight lent elegance to its shabby granite walls and to the storm-battered trees that surrounded it. In this light, it assumed the dignity of a steepled church, with its tall chimneys rising from steep, converging roofs and the uneven tree-tops crowding to its eaves like a misty cloud of incense.

Julia hated the house, just as if it were a living creature armed with occult power. She felt that it was in some way responsible for removing the man she loved from conversation with her. He was within its walls at this moment. Through the trees, she could see the light from the study in which he sat with Raoul. For almost a month now, he had been a daily visitor at Manister Lodge. She had been unable to speak to him in private during all that time. Even though Annie Fitzpatrick assured her that it was Raoul he came to visit, the poor girl was tormented by frantic jealousy. She was jealous of Lettice, "the red-haired

French girl" of whose charm the whole village was talking.

Julia had come to this lane nearly every night during the past month, to wait until he emerged from the Lodge and came hurrying down the sloping flat fields, on his way to Mag Jordan's cottage. She was always taken by a violent fit of shame when she saw him. When he approached her position in the lane, she always took to her heels. She would run all the way home, go to her bedroom, lock her door, throw herself face downwards on her bed and spend the night in wakeful agony. Sometimes she was able to cry and feel sorry for herself. Mostly, however, she just lay on her bed without tears, contemplating the anguish of her soul.

To-night she stood her ground when she saw him come towards her across the fields. A letter that she had been asked to give him lay within the bosom of her dress. Even though shame made her cheeks look on fire, the presence of the letter within her dress gave her courage to stand fast.

He did not see her until he was climbing across the stile into the lane. He halted halfway across and looked at her in angry surprise.

"What are you doing here?" he said curtly.

Julia did not reply. He jumped down, took her by the arms and drew her to a crouching position against the fence:

"Didn't I tell you to keep away from me?" he whispered.

"I was given a letter for you," Julia said, with her eyes on the ground.

"Why didn't you send it over to Mag Jordan's house?" Michael said. "Why did you come here with it?"

"I went over to Mag Jordan's," Julia said. "Mag told me you had gone to the Lodge. I rushed over to Mag's house with it, as soon as I came home from Clash. I ran with it at once, because the man told me it was so important."

"Why didn't you leave it with Mag?" Michael said.

"I promised the man not to part with it except to yourself," said Julia.

"What man?" Michael cried angrily. "What man are you talking about?"

Julia looked up at him suddenly, trembling and with tears in her eyes.

"What has come between us, Michael?" she cried in a tremulous voice. "Why did you suddenly turn cruel? Why do you keep away from me? What have I done to make you change like this all of a sudden. Is it something you heard about me?"

Michael stared at her in silence for a few moments. Then he gripped her arm.

"I told you that I didn't want you to come near me," he said harshly.

"You want other people to come near you, though," Julia cried hysterically. "You want that red-haired French girl to come near you, all right."

"Shut up," Michael said, "if you know what is good for you. Give me that letter."

Julia shuddered. Instead of giving him the letter, she covered her face with her hands.

"So that's it?" Michael said. "All this talk about having a letter was just an excuse to come here and annoy me."

Julia sobbed, took the letter from her bosom and gave it to him. He held the envelope close to his eyes and peered at the inscription.

"Where did you get this?" he said.

"A man gave it to me in the streets of Clash," she said bitterly.

She had now recovered from her fit of shame. She hated him intensely. Her voice had turned harsh.

"Who was the man?" Michael said, turning the envelope round and round between his fingers suspiciously.

"I don't know who he was," Julia said. "I was going down Shop Street when he spoke to me. 'Are you Julia McNamara?' he said. 'I am,' said I. Then he gave me the letter. 'Give this to Michael O'Dwyer,' he said. 'There's information in it that may save his life. It's a matter of life and death for him to get this information at once. Hurry to him with it.' Then he made me promise, on my soul, several times, not to give the letter to anybody but yourself. After I promised, he tipped his hat and made off down Simon's Lane. So I hurried back home and went to Mag Jordan's to find you. For all the thanks I got, I needn't have been in such a hurry."

"What kind of man was he?" Michael said.

"He had only one eye," Julia said, "and there was a yellow muffler twisted round his neck. He was thin and he wore a blue suit. That's all I remember about him."

Michael put the envelope into his pocket and said:

"Why should a stranger give you a message for me?"

"And who would be more entitled to get a message for you?" Julia cried.

"Are you trying to make out that you have a claim on me?" Michael said.

She shuddered and remained silent.

"Be on your way, Julia," he said in a menacing tone. "I'm in no humour for your foolishness."

"It wasn't foolishness last winter," Julia cried, speaking very rapidly. "You lay out on the mountain all day, with hailstones falling, waiting for Captain Butcher to pass. You came back home sadly without seeing him, sick to the marrows of your bones. You got pneumonia. For five days I didn't close an eye. I was there beside your bed, listening to each breath that came from your labouring throat. When the fear of death was on you, I used to get into bed beside you and take you in my arms and fondle you. You didn't think it was foolishness then. Mag Jordan is there to prove that I'm telling no lie. For five days and nights you lay there. It was touch and go with you. Oh! No, Michael, it was no foolishness then. You wouldn't let me go more than a foot away from the side of your bed. Then you got better. That was in January. For a month after that, while you were gathering your strength, you would take my hand and look into my eyes and swear that you would never forget what I had done for you."

"Be on your way now, Julia," Michael said in a low voice.

Julia suddenly threw herself against his chest. Hatred of him had given way to an overpowering longing. She clutched at his clothes and rubbed her cheek against his chest, like a dog fondling its owner.

"Oh! God!" she moaned. "Don't send me from you. I can't live without you. I put mortal sin on my soul because of you. I'm damned on account of the way I love you. I was pure before I met you. Now I'm tormented night and day. Have pity on me. Speak kindly to me, Michael, like you would to a beggar out of charity. I have no pride left. There isn't even fear of God left in me. I'll do anything for you . . . anything . . . anything."

Her voice became inarticulate. Now only her sobbing was distinct. She twisted about a little while longer like a wounded creature. Then she lay still against him. Her luxuriant black hair had broken loose from its coils. It streamed down about her face in disorder. She lay with her right cheek against his chest and her arms hanging limp, one on either side of him. Her face looked white and very beautiful as she lay that way, with her eyes closed and her black hair tumbling down in billowing folds.

Michael's face showed no emotion. He sat rigidly against the base of the fence, one leg thrust straight out from him, until her outburst had come to an end. Then he took her gently in his arms.

"Listen to me, Julia," he said.

She raised her head, looked at him arrogantly and began to arrange her hair.

"What did you mean by saying I put mortal sin on your soul?" he said.

"Leave me alone," Julia said, drawing farther away from him.

"I can't let you tell a lie of that sort," Michael said. "I never laid a hand on you. How could I put mortal sin on your soul?"

"You fool!" she cried bitterly. "What would a person like you know about such things?"

"All right, then," Michael said, "Be on your way."

Julia got to her feet and walked across the lane. She leaned her arms against the top of the opposite fence and looked out over the sea.

"Did you hear what I said?" Michael said, coming over to her.

"I told you to be on your way."

Julia swung round and faced him, with her hands on her hips and her head thrown back. In this posture she looked very proud and beautiful.

"What you say from now on, Michael O'Dwyer," she said, "makes no difference to me. No difference at all."

Michael shrugged his shoulders and walked down the lane towards the fishermen's hamlet of tiny thatched cabins, that lay huddled together by the pier. She watched him go. The sound of his retreating footsteps on the grass gave her intense pain. Then only the top of his head was visible and his feet no longer made any sound. A few moments later, she had lost sight of him altogether.

"God have mercy on me!" she muttered, putting her arms on the fence and looking out to sea once more. "Ah! God help me!"

A homing cormorant was flying down the silver lane made by the moonlight on the water. The long black wings almost touched the waves, as they strained to bear in flight the fish-laden gullet of the bird. All was still. Even the wind made no sound, as it flowed steadily from the west, bearing the first voluptuous heat of summer on its breath.

She stayed there for a long time, looking out over the sea without thought. She had come to a decision that would make dreamy thought a pain for evermore.

CHAPTER XI

MAG JORDAN'S COTTAGE, WHERE Michael lodged, stood on a knoll above the western end of the pier, on the outskirts of the fishermen's hamlet. It was a slate-roofed building of one story, surrounded by a little stone-walled garden. Its black door and black-framed windows threw the whiteness of its walls into

relief against the yellow background of the peninsula's faded shore grass.

As Michael's feet crunched on the path of coloured sea-pebbles that ran through the garden to the door, the sound of excited conversation ceased abruptly within the house.

"Get my supper ready," he said gruffly to Mag Jordan as he entered the kitchen.

There were five men in the kitchen. He nodded casually to them as he crossed the floor to the door of his bedroom.

"I have the tea drawing," Mag Jordan said. "I have only to put the eggs in the boiling water."

"Be quick about it, then," Michael said.

He went into his room and closed the door after him.

"Prut!" Mag Jordan said. "He's in a temper this evening."

She was a red-faced little woman of middle age, very stout, wearing a man's low-necked shirt of white frieze over her blue dress.

"That French girl doesn't seem to be doing him much good," she muttered on her way to the hearth.

Michael lit a candle at a small table by the window of his bedroom and read the letter that Julia had given him. It took him a long time to understand it, owing to the many errors in grammar and spelling.

"A man with one eye," it said in effect, "is waiting for you at Sabina Hart's eating-house in the town of Clash. That's me, Liverpool Joe Crimmins. Come as soon as you read this. Bring five sovereigns. Spare yourself the journey unless you have the sovereigns. I have information for you about the man that got your father hanged. The same man is plotting to hang you as well. He is paid by Butcher and the English. He is high up in the Fenians. I have the proof written down. Don't delay. He'll strike any minute now. Ask for Liverpool Joe."

Michael put the letter in his pocket, quenched the candle and stared out of the window at the masts of boats that were moored at the pier down below. The tapering spars seemed to be within arm's reach.

"Your supper is ready now," Mag Jordan called to him.

He got to his feet and continued to stare out the window. Girls were singing on the yellow strand below the village. Their song of yearning love came gently over the water.

"Come and eat your supper," Mag Jordan called out again.

He went into the kitchen and sat down to table. After he had drunk a little tea, he turned to a man that sat on a three-legged stool to the left of the hearth.

"Did you come from Grealish in your *pucaun*, Pat?" he said.

The man whom he addressed was Patrick Lynch, a blacksmith from the island of Grealish and second to Michael in command of the Fenian organisation of that district. He was thirty years old, of stocky build, with a thick neck, a round face and grey eyes that were set wide apart. He held his head to one side, with one eye closed, like a man taking aim. His right hand was buried to the wrist in the pocket of his frieze jacket.

"Yes," he said. "She's tied down at the pier."

"Get her ready," Michael said, breaking an egg. "We're going to Clash in her, as soon as I finish supper."

"To Clash, did you say?" Lynch said in astonishment.

"That's what I said," Michael answered.

"It might take us half the night to get there in my *pucaun*," Lynch said. "It's nearly dead calm."

"Get her ready," Michael said.

"It would take us longer still to get back," Lynch said. "What wind there is would be against us. If we made any delay at all in Clash, we might miss the meeting."

"Do what I said," Michael ordered angrily.

Lynch turned on his heel at once. On his way to the door, he called to another man over his shoulder.

"Come on, Joe," he said.

Joe Deering, who was sitting on the floor with his back to the wall, got to his feet slowly. He was very tall and so young that the down of adolescence still grew on his unshaven cheeks. He followed Lynch out of the room, moving his hips lazily.

"Come here, William," Michael said.

William Flatley came over to the table. He was a man of great size, with a barrel-shaped chest and a completely bald head. He was noted for his strength and endurance, even though he was now well over forty years old. He had come from America with Michael. He bent over the table and listened intently to some whispered commands. Then he went out without saying a word.

After a little while, Tim Brady rose from his seat in the hearth corner and approached the table. He was Mag Jordan's brother, a solemn faced man of fifty-four, with a lame leg. They called him "the soldier" in the village, because he had served in the American Civil War. He and his sister were agents for a Dublin firm of fish-buyers.

"If you want to go to Clash," he said quietly, "why don't you go by road? Then you'd surely be back in time for the meeting. By road, it's only a few miles. By sea, it's three times the distance and always an uncertain journey."

"I have my reasons for not going by road," Michael said angrily.

"Then, in God's name, don't go at all," Brady said. "Tomorrow is a big day for the people of Manister. The whole parish will be gathered in the chapel yard, after eleven o'clock Mass, to elect a Committee and make plans for fighting the landlords. For nearly a month now, Michael, you have been working tooth and nail to organise this meeting. You had a hard struggle, with the parish priest against you. It would be a terrible thing if you were absent when the big moment came."

He paused, waiting for Michael to reply.

"Nobody is going to get me into a trap," Michael said suddenly. Then he continued to eat rapidly.

"The Archbishop has put out a pastoral letter," Brady continued, "condemning the land agitation and the Fenians. Father Costigan is going to read that letter from the altar. He'll make a big effort to turn the people against the idea of electing a Committee. If you should be absent . . ."

"I'm not going to put my head in a halter for any man," Michael said.

"The people might never forgive you," Brady said, "if you failed them at this moment."

Michael drank the remainder of the tea in his cup and jumped to his feet.

"You've said enough," he cried.

"Then, let me tell you this," Brady shouted. "There is nothing more criminal than to rouse innocent people, only to desert them."

"You've said enough," Michael repeated.

He walked to the door, after beckoning to a young man that sat expectantly on a form by the wall. The young man jumped to his feet and bolted out of the house after his leader. He was called Coleman Kelly, a lad of about Deering's age. They climbed down to the pier by a rough stairway that was cut into the granite rock. Lynch and Deering had already hoisted the sail on the *pucaun*.

"In God's name," Lynch said to Michael as the latter jumped on board, "won't you change your mind and go by road?"

"Silence," Michael said.

Flatley came trotting down the pier with a small sack under his arm. He untied the mooring rope and jumped on board. Deering pushed against the pier wall with a pole. The *pucaun* veered away suddenly and then halted. Its keel made a rasping sound as it grated against a rock. The tide was so low that even

such a shallow craft had difficulty in getting under way. Thick masses of yellow weeds lay on the surface like floating tresses of long hair. They made a moaning sound as they brushed against the boat's sides. Kelly took another pole and helped Deering push. The *pucan* suddenly frolicked like a duck as it found clear water. Lynch put his back to the tiller and began to steer, hauling on the sail ropes. Deering and Kelly, having dropped their poles, each put a foot against the mast and heaved the sail to its full height. The ropes creaked musically as they ran through the blocks. The sail flapped several times. Then it filled with wind and became taut.

Flatley sat by the foot of the mast and opened the sack he had brought. It contained revolvers, a box of cartridges and a whip called the "cat-o'-nine-tails," because of its nine thongs. He passed around the weapons and the ammunition. He put the whip under the front of his jersey.

"Does the 'cat' mean we're going after an informer?" Lynch said.

"It might," said Michael.

"Is that all you want to say?" Lynch said.

Michael stripped off all his clothes, throwing them on the ballast stones at the bottom of the hold. Then he jumped into the sea and began to swim away from the boat with powerful strokes. Deering and Kelly looked at one another, smiled and did likewise. The two lads gasped as they began to swim, feeling the coldness of the night water against their white skins.

"Why don't you try and persuade him to turn back?" Lynch said to Flatley. "What the hell ails him, in any case?"

Flatley shrugged his shoulders and took a pipe from his pocket.

"He thinks there has been a trap laid for him," he muttered.

"A fine story," Lynch said. "If a man gets into such a state of nerves that he's afraid of his own shadow . . ."

"None of that now," Flatley said. "If I were you, I'd forget about it."

He lit the pipe, smoked a little and added:

"Just obey orders. He can be a dangerous man, when he's in a mood like this."

"Blood in ounce!" Lynch said. "It's hard to put up with him at times."

"Sure," Flatley said. "It's better to keep your mouth shut just the same."

He handed Lynch the pipe after a while, adding:

"I've seen him do a lot more queer things than this. I'd go to hell for him just the same. He's that sort of a leader."

"I suppose he is," Lynch said, drawing on the pipe. "Sure. I'd follow him to hell if he asked me. At the same time . . ."

Deering and Kelly came back to the boat after a while. They rubbed themselves dry with their trousers. They were shivering even after they had put on their clothes. The *pucaun* had passed the headland and turned north before Michael came on board. He had been swimming for nearly an hour. Yet he showed no sign of cold or weariness. He put on his clothes without drying his skin. Then he took the tiller from Lynch. The two lads began to sing, as they stood by the bowsprit, clinging to the sail ropes.

It was long after midnight when they reached Clash Harbour. They moored the *pucaun* to a deserted wharf and marched through the silent streets to Sabina Hart's eating-house. It was a two-storied building, standing at the corner of a narrow cobbled lane. There was a light in the ground-floor window. Michael left Lynch, Deering and Kelly on guard outside. He and Flatley went to the door.

A man put his head out of a second-floor window after Flatley had knocked.

"Who's there?" the man said.

"I'm looking for Liverpool Joe," Michael said.

"I'm your man," said the other. "Give a foot to the door. I'll be down as soon as I get dressed."

Flatley pushed open the door and entered the house, followed by Michael.

"God save all here," Michael said.

There was an old woman crouched on a stool in a corner of the hearth. She picked up a pair of tongs from a heap of yellow ashes that surrounded the embers of a spent fire.

"Get out of here," she shouted, brandishing the tongs.

"Keep quiet," Michael said. "We have business with a man upstairs."

"Oho!" said the old woman, quickly becoming friendly. "So it's the Fenians that's in it. 'Faith, you're welcome, Michael O'Dwyer. Come on over and I'll give you a sup of ale out of the jug."

There were several eating tables in the large room. One table was covered with a cloth, on which lay the remains of a meal. A stairway led to the upper story from the far corner.

"He's afraid of me," the old woman said in disgust, as Michael made no move to accept her invitation. "Ah! Woe! There was a day when young men weren't frightened of me."

She took a jug of ale from the hob, spat into the fire and drank. Her grey hair hung in disorder about her face and her enormous

breasts lay exposed through her torn shift. Her naked feet were speckled with yellow ashes. She wore her skirt rolled up to the waist, showing a number of fine lace petticoats.

"I get frightened myself," she said, "when anybody comes in late at night, ever since Sarah Burke and her brother attacked me last winter. They put a table over my belly and then they danced on the table. They stole two shawls that were never used twice, twenty-four bundles of flannel and it thickened, six score of eggs and five yards of calico. The police said it was delirium tremens I had, when I reported the outrage. The devils! They have it in for me, because I smuggle arms for the Fenians."

There was a patter of feet on the stairs. Then an agile little man came into the room.

"I'm Joe Crimmins," he said, walking rapidly across the floor to Michael. "Liverpool Joe they call me. I'm easy to recognise."

He pointed towards the empty socket of his left eye. The other eye was small and very intense, like the eye of a bird. He was about sixty, a withered little man with a sharply tapering skull. He wore a blue suit and he had a yellow muffler twisted round his neck.

"Did you bring the money?" he said to Michael.

"What information have you got, Crimmins?" Michael said.

Crimmins rubbed his thumb rapidly against the tips of his fingers.

"I asked you a question," Michael continued in an even tone.

"I only talk when I see the colour of a customer's money," Crimmins said.

"Oho!" said the old woman. "Joe is a clever fox. He's been smuggling guns to me now for twenty years, but I never yet got the better of him."

"A man has to be clever in my business, Sabina," Crimmins said in a conceited tone. "I've smuggled more guns into Ireland than any other man in the business. I've smuggled them into England, too, from the Continent. I've sold guns to the Fenians, to the Chartists and to whoever cared to buy them. Yet I've never been caught."

"Show him the 'cat,'" Michael said to Flatley. "Maybe that will make him talk."

Flatley pulled the whip from under his jersey and flicked it before the little man's face.

"Jesus!" Crimmins said in an awed whisper.

"May the cholera not go past the two of ye," the old woman said. "Is it going to kill poor little Joe ye are?"

She got to her feet with surprising agility and rushed at Flatley with a short club that had lain concealed beneath her petticoats.

She lost her balance after a few steps and fell to the floor, where she lay motionless on her stomach.

"Give him a little touch across the legs," Michael said to Flatley.

Crimmins seemed to be hypnotised by the whip. His solitary eye was distended and his right shoulder was raised high up in a grotesque attitude. He broke from his trance when he saw Flatley raise the whip. He threw himself on his knees at Michael's feet.

"I have a weak heart," he said. "The least touch of the 'cat' would kill me. You can have the envelope for nothing."

"On your feet, then," Michael said. "Hand it over."

Crimmins got to his feet and took a large envelope from his breast pocket. Michael took it and walked over to a lighted paraffin lamp that hung on a nail in the wall.

"You coward!" screamed the old woman as she struggled to her knees.

"I have to be careful, Sabina," Crimmins whined.

"You'll have to be careful of me, then, you rat," the old woman said as she stood erect.

She spat on her club and added:

"Now, then, Liverpool Joe, where's my share of the necessary?"

"Don't let her come near me," Crimmins said to Flatley.

"Butcher paid you, but he didn't pay me," the old woman cried. "The extra five sovereigns were to be my share. Where are they?"

"Shut your mouth," Crimmins hissed as he edged towards the stairway.

Flatley ran over to Michael and said in a tense whisper:

"Did you hear what she said about Butcher?"

Michael nodded as he continued to read the documents he had taken from the envelope.

"Don't let her come near me," Crimmins screamed as he ran up the stairs.

Cursing under her breath, the old woman trudged up the stairs after him.

"Will I stop her?" Flatley said to Michael.

Michael shook his head without taking his eyes from the documents.

"For the love of God, save me," Crimmins shouted from above.

He became silent. The old woman reached the top of the stairs. She paused there for a little while. There was dead silence in the house. Then they heard the thumping of her club as she moved across the floor. Suddenly there was a wild shriek, followed by a dull thud. Then again there was silence.

"Let's go," Michael said.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE FOLLOWING MORNING, Julia McNamara announced to her parents at breakfast that she was ready to marry the man they had chosen for her.

"You can have your wish now," she said bitterly. "I'll marry Jim Clancy any day you want. From now on, it doesn't matter to me what I do."

Having made this statement, she sat bolt upright in her chair and stared fixedly at a point on the wall like a demented person. Her mother hurried round the table and embraced her with cries of woe.

"God have mercy on us, daughter," the mother said. "Don't frighten me by staring like that."

Julia made no response to her mother's words.

"Now, isn't that a proper caution?" the father said. "They pretend that something terrible has happened and they blame me for it. It's enough to drive a man crazy."

He peered over the rims of his spectacles across the table at his wife and daughter.

"It's always like this," he moaned. "It's been like this all my life. Anything I want badly turns out to have a bitter taste when I get it. For more than a year, Julia, I've been praying to the Blessed Virgin for you, asking her to put sense into your foolish head. Now when you seem to have been given a little sense by those above, you behave in a way that makes me feel a criminal."

He jumped to his feet, struck the table and shouted:

"Sit down, Sarah, and stop spoiling that ungrateful daughter of yours. If I had taken a rod to her, same as I should have done, she wouldn't now be giving me sleepless nights. Bad cess to you, Julia, in any case. For the past six months you have made your mother and me a pair of show-boards in this parish and you running after Michael O'Dwyer with no more modesty than if you were belly naked. Michael O'Dwyer, indeed, a man that wouldn't give you so much as the heat of his breath on a frosty morning. Signs on, when he began to court that French girl over at the Lodge, he avoided you just as if he owed you money. By the Book! I'm a friend of the Fenians and as staunch a patriot as you would find in the country. That's a far cry, though, from wanting to have an outlaw for a son-in-law. There is a limit to everything. That young man will likely swing at the end of a

rope like his father before him. It's not respectable marriage he wants, but blood and woe. Broken-hearted about that madman, is it? Sure, he hasn't let you come within an ass's roar of him since he got a whiff of the French girl's perfume. Stop looking at that wall now. If you don't quit staring like that, I'll . . ."

He picked up the bread-knife and advanced on his daughter in a threatening fashion.

"Be careful now, Bartly," his wife said gently. "You might hurt yourself again with that knife."

Several years previously, he had picked up a similar knife during an argument with his wife. He had hurled it to the floor in order to stress a point. His foot got in the way and he wounded himself quite seriously. Now he felt deeply mortified, on being reminded of this incident by Sarah.

"You always take her part," he said sulkily, laying the knife gently on the table. "Am I always in the wrong, then? God help me! My only son became a priest on a foreign mission. He is now lost to me forever, out preaching to the bloody negroes of Central Africa, where he'll most likely die of fever unless he's trodden under foot by wild elephants. My four daughters are all in America. It's hardly likely that I'll clap eyes on any of them, either. Is it too much to ask that my remaining child should do my bidding? And all I'm asking of her is to marry Jim Clancy, a fine young man that has the best people in the parish for relatives, together with three houses in this village, two farms and . . ."

"Shut up, father," Julia said rudely as she got to her feet. "Why can't you ever keep your mouth closed?"

"God forgive you, child," Bartly said timidly to her.

He was frightened by the strange indifference of her tone and the terrible pallor that had destroyed her beauty.

"You're the laughing stock of the whole village," she cried as she went to the door.

She looked back at him over her shoulder from the doorway and added:

"Even the children imitate you, when they are playing shop."

Bartly threw himself on to his chair when the door had closed after her. He covered his face with his hands and shuddered. His wife came over and put her arm about his thin shoulders.

"Forgive her, Bartly," his wife said. "You have to make allowances for her. She is in love with Michael O'Dwyer and you have to take pity on her. She's a good daughter, except when the poor creature gets tormented by whatever it is that ails her."

Bartly looked at his wife indignantly. She was a big, heavy

woman with a double chin and an unseemly stomach. Only her eyes and her luxuriant black hair showed any trace of the beauty which her daughter had inherited from her.

"Pooh!" Bartly said. "You'd think by your talk that I hated her. Sure, I know she gets tormented by something or other. Didn't I consult the best doctors in the country about her? Didn't they all tell me the same thing? 'Get her a husband,' they said. And isn't that what I'm trying to get her?"

"Hush now, Bartly," his wife said.

"Don't hush me, Sarah," Bartly said, "Father Costigan, a wise man, told me the same thing. 'If she had a good man in her bed,' Father Cornelius said, 'you wouldn't hear a *giog* of complaint out of her.' Declare to God, he said that and more of the same."

"Be on your way to Mass now," his wife said, "or else you'll be late."

Bartly jumped to his feet at once and hurried out into the hallway. His wife followed him. She and Julia had gone to an earlier Mass. She dusted the back of his swallow-tailed coat, while he brushed his high hat on his sleeve in front of the mirror.

"Be careful now," she said, "not to get into any arguments after Mass, if there is a meeting, as they say there will be. Just keep your mouth shut, or else come on home quietly. These are terrible times. You never know where a foolish word might lead you, especially when you are excited in the way you are now. On account of the reputation for foolishness that you have . . ."

"So I have a reputation for foolishness, have I?" cried Bartly.

He had just finished arranging his hat on his skull to his satisfaction. Now he threw it to the floor with violence. Then he clasped his hands in front of his face and posed before the mirror like an actor.

"Oh! God!" he cried passionately, looking at himself in the mirror. "I was left an orphan at the age of ten. I was apprenticed to a tyrant that beat me nearly every day and gave me only a small skillet of cold gruel for my supper and made me sleep all alone on the floor of a loft, with only a torn sack for a covering and with the rats crawling over me. Yet that was nothing compared to what I'm now suffering under my own roof, at the hands of my own wife and daughter. I've put up with a lot of humiliation and insult in my life, but I'm not going to do so any more. Oh! No! Too long have I been a toe-rag, for anybody that saw fit to wipe his feet on me. From now on, I'm going to be a rebel and a menace to humanity."

His wife picked up his hat, wiped it and offered it to him gently. He grabbed it from her and swung it round his head.

"I'm going to be a rebel," he shouted at the top of his voice. He clapped the hat on to his skull and strode to the door. There he looked back at his wife and raised his clenched fist.

"Too long have I been a toe-rag," he yelled. "From now on I'm a rebel."

CHAPTER XIII

THERE WAS TENSE SILENCE as Father Costigan turned round on the altar to deliver his sermon. The church was crowded. Even the aisle leading to the Communion rails was packed. Everybody stared fixedly at the parish priest. Many of the faces were openly hostile. A number of the men present carried blackthorn sticks.

Through the open door, a still larger crowd could be seen in the yard. Bareheaded men and women, shoulder to shoulder, covered the green slope all the way down to the road.

The priest looked very calm as he began to speak, with his fingers laced across his chest beneath the upper vestment.

"Before I read the pastoral letter from His Grace, the Archbishop," he said, "I want to make my own position clear, with regard to the struggle against the landlords. Last January, I attended a conference at Clash. Michael Davitt put his views before the conference, pleading for a national organisation to meet the present crisis. There was unanimous agreement with his aims. On my return to this parish, I became actively engaged in exploring all avenues that might lead to the election of a Committee, for the purpose of helping in the struggle. Now, however, I am forced to conclude that Mr. Davitt deliberately misled us at Clash. He and his followers, by the adoption of revolutionary methods, have made themselves anathema to . . ."

At that moment, a man that stood just within the door brandished a stick and cried:

"Up the Fenians!"

Another man, from a position in the doorway, put his cupped hands around his mouth and shouted:

"Three cheers for Michael Davitt!"

Farther out in the yard, a group of young men shouted in chorus: "O'Dwyer Abu!"

The main body of the congregation took no part in this demonstration. On the contrary, they felt that it bordered on sacrilege. A murmur of indignation passed through the church.

Even so, the demonstration continued. At last, there was a stampede into the yard by the group of young men responsible for the shouting. Women screamed as they were crushed against the wall by those hurriedly seeking an exit. Yelling became general in the yard.

Father Costigan's haughty face remained perfectly composed during this ill-mannered protest against his leadership. He made no attempt to interfere. Being a clever man, he knew that any command issued by him at that moment would be disobeyed and that his prestige would suffer gravely as a consequence. So he looked on calmly with his hands clasped beneath his vestment, as if the disturbance were of no account.

Again there was tense silence within the church. Even so, he was forced to raise his voice considerably on continuing his address, owing to the tumult in the yard.

"The events at Irishtown on the nineteenth of last month," he said, "were an outrage against the Catholic Church. On that day, Michael Davitt and his followers tore off the mask of patriotism. They showed themselves in their true colours as the Communist disciples of Karl Marx. They openly preached the dismal Communist faith, that tried to drown Paris nine years ago in a welter of Christian blood. Naked savages could not have behaved worse than Irish Catholics did towards Canon Geoffrey Bourke, the saintly parish priest of Irishtown, on the nineteenth of April."

Again there was a protest. This time it was general and without restraint. Even the most conservative and devout among the parishioners took part in it. Women shook their fists at him. Men stamped on the floor and cursed. Little boys put their fingers between their teeth and whistled.

It was the mention of Canon Bourke's name that had caused this most scandalous scene. The priest in question, even though Father Cornelius had referred to him as "saintly," was a notorious landlord and exploiter of the poor. His tenants, being threatened with eviction for arrears of rent, had appealed for aid to Michael Davitt. A force of six thousand men came in answer to their appeal. Canon Bourke's house was surrounded. Speeches were delivered. The priest got afraid and capitulated at once to the demands of the tenants. This victory over a cruel landlord was hailed everywhere as a victory by the people. It was only natural, therefore, that Father Costigan's congregation should have felt mortally insulted on hearing Canon Bourke described as "saintly." There was, indeed, some measure of excuse for their shameful conduct.

All but a few score of the people left the church at this juncture.

Seeing that it would be ridiculous to continue "making his position clear" to those who remained, Father Cornelius hurriedly read the archbishop's pastoral letter. It was very short, merely forbidding all Catholics to associate in any way with Michael Davitt or the Fenians, who were branded as dangerous "to faith and morals."

In the meantime, the people rushed about the crowded yard, shouting and brandishing their sticks. Here and there an excited man tried to address those nearest to him, only to be carried away after a few moments by a general rush to another part of the yard. Even women tried to find an audience for their oratory, with their shawls thrown back from their heads, which bobbed violently from side to side.

People shouted O'Dwyer's name. They asked one another why he was absent and what had happened to him.

"He promised us to be here," they cried. "Now where is he?"

Nobody had any information. Even the young men who were members of the Fenian Society had no information. Then the shrill voice of Bartly McNamara suddenly rose above the tumult.

"Men and women of Manister," Bartly cried. "Gather round and listen."

He had taken up his position on the flat top of a gate-post. With his high hat clutched before his bosom, he kept bowing in all directions, just like a garrulous duck.

"Gather round me," he cried. "I want to talk to you."

He received a very hostile reception at first from the people, to whom he was known as the parish priest's chief crony. He had also been secretary to the local branch of the Tenant League, an organisation that had fallen into disrepute owing to its collaboration with the English garrison. Finally, he was a shopkeeper. The crowd, almost entirely composed of fishermen and farmers and artisans, regarded all shopkeepers as usurers and blood-suckers.

"Arrah! Look at himself," said a huge man who mounted the gatepost beside Bartly. "Look who wants to talk, the parish priest's straw man, the money-grabber, the *gombeen* man."

He took Bartly by the crutch and by the nape of the neck.

"Take a good look at the scrawny little devil," he cried, lifting the shopkeeper high into the air, "before I shake the life out of him."

Bartly was by no means intimidated.

"Listen to me, good people," he shouted as he dangled in the air, swinging his thin legs back and forth like a puppet. "I have an important talk to make."

The crowd began to get impressed by the courage of the little fellow.

"Let the wart have his say," a woman said.

Several people shouted in agreement with this woman. The huge man dropped Bartly on to the gate-post.

"All right," the big fellow said. "Let him talk, then, but I'm standing here beside him. One word out of him against the Fenians and I'll split his skull clean down the middle."

"Have no fear," Bartly said. "Sure, I'm the best friend the Fenians have in the parish. Who subscribes more to their funds than I do? They never go away empty-handed when they come to Bartly McNamara for a subscription."

"True for you, Bartly," a young Fenian shouted. "You're never short of hearing, when we give you the hard word."

"What's more," Bartly said, "I have handed over my good money for every worthy cause that made a demand on me, good money that is hard earned. That is more important than wild talk."

An important section of the crowd applauded this point of view.

"You have to give the creature his due," a man said. "You could blow him off your palm with one breath, but he always had courage and generosity."

"Usurer and all that he is," another man cried, "you'd find worse maybe before you'd find any better."

"I can't help being a shopkeeper," Bartly said. "God made me one. It's unfair, though, to look upon all shopkeepers as usurers. These days, believe it or not, it's little profit there is in shopkeeping. The farmer, the artisan, the fisherman and the shopkeeper are all in the one boat. The farmers and the fishermen are ruined, so they can't buy from the merchants, except on credit. The merchants have given all the credit they can carry. Now they may close their doors and go begging, unless something is done to set the wheels of commerce rolling again. And we all know that the wheels of commerce can't roll while the landlords are demanding rack-rents and getting them with the help of the government. Then, in God's name, let us get rid of the landlords. We are all in the one boat, as I said before, so let us stop fighting one another and unite against the common enemy."

There was a wild shout of applause. The whole crowd was now on his side.

"Nearly every other parish in the county has already elected a Committee," he continued. "Manister is being held back by one man. We all know who he is."

"We know who he is," the people shouted.

"Are we going to let one man make cowards of us?" said Bartly.
"No," the people shouted.

At this moment, Father Costigan came running down the green slope from the sacristy.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, shaking his fist at Bartly. "Get down from that gate-post."

He was hurriedly taking off his vestments in the sacristy, when he heard McNamara address the people. He had rushed out while still wearing the alb. He was forced to hold up the skirts of this long white garment as he ran, in order to avoid being tripped by it. Pat Rice, the sacristan, came shuffling along behind.

"You traitor!" Father Costigan shouted when he reached Bartly.

The little shopkeeper stood his ground. He made a half turn, put his hat behind his back, thrust his head forward and faced the parish priest boldly.

"Neither you nor any other man has the right to call me a traitor," he cried in a firm and respectful tone. "What's more, it's not a becoming thing for you to say, considering all I have done for you."

"Get down," said Father Cornelius, "before I lay hands on you."

"I'm only doing my duty," Bartly said. "We are faced with another famine, maybe worse than the last one, unless we organise as Mr. Davitt says we should."

"True for you," shouted the huge man who had previously raised Bartly up by the crutch. "Let him have it now. We are all with you."

"Are you going to obey me or not?" Father Cornelius said.

The sacristan reached the parish priest's side at that moment.

"Let me take the vestment, your reverence," he whispered excitedly, "for fear it might get contaminated."

Father Costigan permitted the old man to remove the alb. During this interval, Bartly addressed the people once more.

"Famine it's going to be," the little shopkeeper said, "unless we take action. The crops have been worse than bad for two years running. Prices keep falling, but rents keep going up. We'll all die in a ditch, like our fathers did, unless we elect a Committee and put up a fight against the landlords."

The sacristan folded the vestment reverently and hurried up the slope with it. The people made way for him respectfully. The old man's fanatic eyes, set in an almost fleshless skull, stared at the white robe that he held out in front of him, to the full reach of his trembling arms.

Father Cornelius took a stick from the hands of a man that stood near him. He spat on the stick and flexed the muscles of his powerful arms. Even at his advanced age, he was still capable of thrashing the best men in his parish.

"For the last time," he said to Bartly, "I invite you to step down from that gate-post."

The frail body of the little shopkeeper was no longer able to sustain the unequal struggle. He became hysterical.

"Too long have I obeyed you like a dog, Father Cornelius," he cried. "I have fetched and carried for you since you came to this parish. Now you turn on me for speaking the truth. I bow low to you as God's messenger. As a man, though, I think you are a bully and a bloody fool, God forgive me for saying so."

The priest raised the stick, intending to strike. The blow was not allowed to fall. A group of men intervened. They caught the stick and removed it from Father Cornelius.

"We mean no disrespect to your reverence," one of them said, "but we have to elect a Committee."

"That's right, Father," another of them said. "The Committee must be elected, by hook or by crook."

There was an awkward silence. The most violent among the people felt awed by the necessity of having had to lay hands on their priest. Even though they were at odds with Father Cornelius at the moment, they all loved him. He had been an excellent parish priest, during his long term of service among them.

"Any one of us would give a fourth of land," an old man said with great feeling, "not to have this come between you and ourselves."

"You'll hold no meeting in this yard," Father Cornelius said, after he had mastered his rage. "I am asking you to leave here quietly, all of you, in God's name. Otherwise, I'll be forced to call in the police for protection against my own parishioners."

"That's fair enough, Father," McNamara said. "We'll hold our meeting at the Father Matthew Hall in the village. It's my property. I'll make a present of it to the people of Manister, as headquarters for the Committee."

Father Cornelius turned on his heel and walked up the slope to the sacristy, where Pat Rice had laid breakfast for him on a little table.

"I can hardly believe it, Pat," he said, as he tucked a napkin under his chin. "It must have been like this in Paris nine years ago."

The aged sacristan made the sign of the Cross on his forehead and looked at Father Cornelius in horror.

"The Paris Commune!" he gasped. "The pagans came out of the slums and set up idols on the holy altars and murdered priests and threw the Blessed Sacrament in the gutter. The Communists spat in the face of God and set up Antichrist as king."

A wild look of suspicion came into his sunken eyes.

"Lord save us!" he whispered. "Do you think Antichrist has come to Manister, Father Cornelius?"

"He may have, at that," Father Cornelius said seriously as he gently broke the top of an egg with his spoon. "I wouldn't be at all surprised to learn that he had arrived in our midst recently."

"From foreign parts?" said the sacristan.

"From foreign parts," Father Cornelius said.

The malign expression of the scandalmonger came into the old man's eyes.

"Say no more, Father Cornelius," he said. "Say no more."

The people formed a column behind McNamara and began to march towards the village, singing revolutionary songs. Bartly carried his hat high up in front of his chest, as he marched proudly in the van. It was the great moment of his life. At one glorious stride, by virtue of his rebellion, he had risen from contempt and obscurity to supreme command of his people. His heart overflowed with joy as he strutted along, bowing right and left to the astonished people that lined the road. It was a triumphal march for the little fellow.

Alas! Such sudden triumphs are always shortlived. It was about half a mile to the village square from the church. It did not take the excited people very long to cover that distance. On debouching into the square, Bartly discovered to his horror that the whole police garrison was drawn up in battle array before the barracks. On receipt of an ominous report from the constable on duty at the church, Sergeant Geraghty made all of his six constables stand to arms. They were now drawn up in line, wearing their service helmets, while they loaded their carbines with ball ammunition in full view of the frightened shopkeeper.

This depressing sight made the little man realize that rebellion, like alcohol, produces a painful reaction to the ecstasy of its intoxication. The metallic sounds made by the opening and closing of the carbine bolts made him wish that he had remained content with being humiliated and downtrodden. He wanted terribly to run away and hide somewhere.

"Oh! God!" he said to himself. "I've done it again. I've certainly made a proper fool of myself this time."

The people behind the shopkeeper were equally intimidated

by the sight of the armed police. The singing came to an abrupt stop. The column halted in silence and confusion before the Father Matthew Hall. This was a one-storied building of no great size. Only a fraction of the throng managed to gain entrance. Those left out in the square, being now without even the semblance of leadership, felt completely at the mercy of the police. They began to whisper among themselves, saying they should have waited to hear from O'Dwyer before acting as they had done. In a word, they were on the verge of panic and dispersal.

The small party that had entered the Hall soon got into a similar state, owing to McNamara's behaviour.

"You are welcome to this Hall now," Bartly said to them, after having mounted the little platform. "The Committee that you elect won't have to pay me a red penny for its use."

He tried to leave the platform after making this statement. The people immediately got angry with him and told him to stay where he was or "it would be worse for him."

"Take charge now that you've started the ball rolling," a man said to him. "You'll have to finish what you began, or we'll flatten your ears for you."

"I never acted as chairman in my life," said McNamara. "Sure I wouldn't know the first thing to do. I'm giving ye the Hall. In God's name, isn't that enough?"

This infuriated the people. They began to abuse him exactly as they had done when he mounted the gate-post to address them. It appeared likely, in fact, that he would be rudely handled by the more violent of them when a retired pig-jobber named Joseph Cleary came to his rescue.

"Stand back there," Cleary shouted as he forced his way into the Hall from the doorway. "I have a suggestion to make and I think it's a good one."

He was an elderly man, of large and bony frame, with a bald head and drooping white moustaches. He was a highly respected parishioner, so the people made way for him.

"Here is what I propose," he said, after having reached the platform. "O'Dwyer can't be found. McNamara doesn't want the job of chairman. He's not fitted for it, in any case, no more than I am myself. Yet we must find a chairman at once, or we'll have no Committee, and Father Costigan will have a good laugh at our expense. So will every parish in the county. We'll be a proper laughing-stock if we go home now without electing a Committee. Do we want to be a laughing-stock and a show-board?"

"No," the people cried. "We want to elect a Committee, same as every other parish."

"Then, I think I have found our man," Cleary said, "the only man that could do the trick, an educated man and a true friend of the people, judging by recent events. I refer to Mr. Raoul Henry St. George."

This statement was received in silence. At first the people looked surprised. Then they looked suspicious. As Lettice had remarked to Elizabeth, they had recently come to like Raoul for the help he had given O'Dwyer. That liking was a far cry, however, from wanting to make him their leader. Hatred of the St. George family had become part of their nature through centuries of oppression. One man's change of heart was not sufficient to suddenly eradicate that hatred.

McNamara overcame their repugnance by his enthusiasm. The shopkeeper was not a party, at least for this moment, to the common hatred. Just now he was so anxious to escape once more, into obscurity and contempt, that he would gladly advocate making the Devil himself leader.

"Three cheers for Mr. St. George," he screamed with savage energy, as he swung his hat above his head. "Hip! Hip!"

The people hesitated for a minute fraction of a second. Then they succumbed to the little man's frenzy and broke into a cheer. Learning what had been decided, those out in the square also cheered wildly. The popular enthusiasm for Raoul was all the more abandoned because of the original revulsion caused by his name.

McNamara, Cleary and a fisherman called Hernon were chosen as a deputation. The whole throng formed into a column for the march to Manister Lodge behind these three men. Again there was singing of revolutionary songs. Indeed, the choice of an aristocrat as their leader gave some men such courage that they cursed the police out loud and brandished their sticks at the barracks.

The throng had crossed the square and was approaching the little bridge leading to the gate of Manister Lodge when Raoul and his daughter came into sight. The column halted at once. After a short whispered consultation, the deputation was allowed to proceed alone. The three men came up with Raoul and Lettice at the very centre of the little wooden bridge.

"Good day, gentlemen," Raoul said, raising his hat.

He looked worried and surprised. Annie Fitzpatrick had brought him news of the disturbance during Mass. Furious because O'Dyer's mysterious absence had upset his carefully laid plans, he set out for the village at once with Lettice, in order to discover what exactly had happened.

"Mr. St. George," McNamara said, "we have a favour to ask of you."

"A favour?" Raoul said.

"We want to elect a Committee, sir," McNamara continued. "There are Committees being set up all over the county, to deal with the terrible emergency that faces the people. We have to fight the landlords or starve, so we must organise. Father Costigan refuses to lead us. The Archbishop has turned the clergy against us. Michael O'Dwyer was leading us until to-day. Now he has disappeared, without hair or hide of him to be seen anywhere. So we are left staggering about, like a hen without a head. In the heel of the hunt, Mr. St. George . . ."

"We came to you," Cleary interrupted, "as it's only fit and proper that we should."

"Take command," the whole throng shouted, beginning to move closer to the bridge. "We want you as our leader."

"You see how it is, sir," said McNamara. "It would be a noble act of charity, if a fine gentleman like yourself, a true friend of the people, stepped into the empty breach and defended the parish of Manister against another famine. Your father, Lord have mercy on his soul, did his best when we were stricken before . . ."

"He did, 'faith," an old woman shouted, "and more power to his memory. He went from door to door, giving bite and sup to the needy, while his own empty belly was screeching with the hunger."

There was tense silence after the old woman had spoken. Raoul stared at the crumbling planks of the old bridge. His upper lip trembled. Then Lettice touched him on the sleeve. He looked at his daughter. She was smiling and nodding her head eagerly.

"You really think I should?" Raoul whispered to her.

"Please, Father," she said, gripping his arm tensely.

Her face was radiant. Raoul had to swallow a lump in his throat, as her joy forced itself upon him.

"I accept the honour with the greatest of pleasure," he said, bowing low to the deputation.

The whole throng rushed on to the little bridge with frenzied shouts. Cleary threw himself in front of them and stretched out his arms.

"Keep back," he cried. "This old bridge is falling to pieces. It will break under the strain."

Ignoring his appeals, the crowd kept pressing forward. Then the railing snapped. There was a cry of fright. A young man was hurtling down into the stream beneath when a neighbour grabbed him. Frightened by this incident, the people allowed

themselves to be driven back on to the road. Raoul and Lettice then advanced, amid a scene of extraordinary enthusiasm.

An elderly man knelt before Raoul bareheaded.

"Lord!" he said, pressing Raoul's hand to his forehead. "May God give you noble addition."

Women crowded round Lettice and kissed her hand.

"May God give you noble addition," they said to her, bowing low.

Lettice received these marks of homage with solemn dignity, as if she had been accustomed to them all her life. Raoul, on the contrary, seemed to be overcome. He was trembling and there were tears in his eyes.

The people marched back to the Hall behind Raoul and Lettice. Now they marched solemnly and in silence, as if conscious of a new dignity. Order had once more been restored in their lives, after a brief moment of frightening anarchy.

CHAPTER XIV

A LIGHT BREEZE swept up from the sea through the garden, breaking the warm stillness of the afternoon. There was a violent fluttering of leaves. Blossoms came adrift.

Elizabeth straightened her back and took a deep breath, to enjoy the delicious fragrance that had been set in motion by the wind. She had been working steadily among the fruit trees for the past two hours. Now she felt pleasantly tired and content.

She looked out over the sea. Tiny islands dotted the surface of the water for about a mile from shore. Farther out there were larger islands, some of them inhabited. A little while ago, the smoke from the houses out there stood against the misty blue wall of the horizon like slender trees. Now the wind had begun to play with the columns of smoke, twisting them into fantastic shapes.

She was about to resume her work when she caught sight of Tim Ahearn coming along the rough wagon road that ran between the brick wall of the garden and the pebbled shore.

"Could I have a word with you, miss?" he shouted to her, while still some distance away.

Elizabeth waited until he had reached the little wooden gate set in the wall before making a reply.

"Come along, Tim," she then said.

He entered the garden and approached her at a leisurely pace, swinging his battered hat back and forth, as his heavy boots crunched irregularly against the gravelled path. He was the "labouring man" in whose settle-bed O'Dwyer had hidden. He was fifty-two years old, short and strongly built, with massive thighs, a thick neck, a long upper lip and a wide-based nose. His gentle and intelligent eyes saved his face from looking uncouth.

"It's about the bullocks, miss," he said, halting at a distance.

"What about them, Tim?" Elizabeth said.

"Should I drive them to the fair next Wednesday?" he said.

"I've told you several times," Elizabeth said severely, "that you must go to my brother about all such things. He is now master here."

"I went to him," Ahearn said. "He only told me to do what I thought best. I don't know what's best, so I came to you for advice."

"That's different," Elizabeth said.

"Prices are terrible," Ahearn said, "since the English threw open their ports to Canadian and American meat. But would they get any better by September? Would it pay to keep the bullocks until the September fair, on the chance that the English might change their laws in the meantime? That's what is troubling me."

"I advise you to sell them on Wednesday," Elizabeth said. "Prices are sure to drop further on account of the political unrest."

"God spare your health, miss," Ahearn said. "You've taken a load off my mind. I wish it was orders instead of advice you were giving me. A poor working man doesn't want the responsibility of doing what he thinks best. He likes to get orders and obey them. Ah! For twenty-one years I was a happy man, coming to you for orders. There's something else I want to talk about, if you can spare the time."

"I always have time for your problems, Tim," Elizabeth said.

"It's about the settle-bed," cried Ahearn. "I want to go back to it. I'm an unhappy man since the master made Annie Fitzpatrick clean out the attic and put a bed there for me. It's a fine bed, the one I have now, with linen sheets, a bolster, the best of woollen blankets and even a quilt. Yet I'm suffering up there, miss. Don't be talking, but every night is a torture for me. I do be hearing queer noises. The fairies keep moving about. They whisper to one another the whole time. Now and again they whistle at me. I'll die of fright, surely, if I have to stay there

much longer. The master thought he was doing me a great favour, when he evicted me from the settle-bed. He wouldn't believe me when I said that I didn't want to move. 'During all these years,' he said, 'you've been treated like a dog, made to sleep in a filthy box and turned into a drunkard and a slovenly character and a liar through lack of self-respect. You've been living in a manner unfit for a human being.' 'I'm very comfortable in that old settle-bed, Mr. Raoul,' I said to him. 'Dignity,' said he, 'is more important than comfort.' Dignity! Who ever heard the like? There was no use arguing with him. He had an answer for everything, like an attorney in a court of law. I told him the kitchen was a handy place for me to sleep, on account of the way I get hungry at all hours of the night. So it's a God-send for me to have the cupboard and the kettle and the fireplace handy. Even a cup of tea, without milk or sugar, together with the heel of a loaf, is a rare treat for a man like me at three o'clock in the morning. 'You've become a glutton as well as a drunkard,' said he when I mentioned the old appetite. He did, indeed, call me a glutton. May God forgive him for it. 'Gluttony,' says he, 'has always been the mark of the slave.' Glory be to God, Miss Elizabeth, but sure it's flying in the face of Divine Providence to call a man a glutton for putting a few stray crumbs of bread between himself and an angry stomach. The master brought back queer notions with him from France. Dignity! We were happy in this house before we heard of dignity and the rights of man."

"It must be a trial for you, Tim," Elizabeth said, "being moved in this harsh way from a place that you had made your home and where you had learned to be content. That is no excuse, though, for criticising your master. I'm afraid that God is going to be angry with you on that account."

"Arrah! God has more sense than that," Ahearn said. "Sure, I'm only complaining of the fairies. It's well-known that the fairies are in league with the Devil."

"Shame on you, Tim," Elizabeth said, "a grown-up man, believing in something that is contrary to Catholic teaching. Fairies don't exist. It's the wind you hear."

"That's exactly what the master said," cried Ahearn with a deep sigh. "He nearly ate the face off me for mentioning the good people. It seems that he's a deadly enemy of the fairies. He called me a reactionary old fossil, whatever that might mean, for talking about them. Learned people like the master and yourself may be right about most things, but not about the fairies. Poor people know more about things that come out of the

dark places. For the love of God, miss, whisper a word to him some evening after supper, when he's in a good humour, asking him to let me back into the settle-bed again."

"I'm afraid it would be of no use," Elizabeth said. "He is very obstinate where his political ideas are concerned."

"What have politics got to do with me sleeping in the settle-bed?" said Ahearn in astonishment. "Even if they had, sure the best rule in politics is to let well enough alone."

"I agree with you," said Elizabeth, "but this is a strange world. The best thing is to submit to God's will."

Ahearn sighed deeply and shrugged his shoulders.

"The master says I must learn the value of human dignity or die in the attempt," he muttered. "Ah! Woe! It's a terrible prospect."

He suddenly put both hands over his heart and leaned towards her on tip-toe, with his body rigid and his face glowing with passion. In this pose he resembled a lover, laying siege to his lady's heart.

"There is no use hiding your head like an ostrich," he cried with great vehemence. "You must try to make him put an end to his foolishness. I don't mind him ruining this sixty-five acres of land that are left to him. God knows it's a little to have left out of a whole barony. It doesn't matter what happens to this miserable *hansel*. Let him have his fun with it. He has no right, though, to tamper with the immortal souls of those depending on him. He has no right to make himself the ringleader of paganism in the parish."

Elizabeth got angry. She herself disapproved of Raoul's political activities, especially since he had become chairman of the Committee. It was quite another matter, though, to hear him criticised on this account by a servant.

"You should be whipped for such impertinence," she cried.

Ahearn threw himself on his knees at her feet and stretched out his hands in humble appeal.

"Don't condemn me, Miss Elizabeth," he said. "I was only repeating what I hear. There isn't a disloyal drop of blood in my veins."

"Get up at once," Elizabeth said curtly. "I still think you should get a whipping. What is this gossip you heard?"

Ahearn got to his feet slowly and said in a grumbling tone:

"Old Pat Rice, the sacristan, is going about saying that Mr. Raoul is the Antichrist. I took the old devil by the throat and threatened to choke him, but he stood his ground. He gave the authority of Father Costigan for his allegation. Mrs. Callinan, the

parish priest's housekeeper, is even worse. It's she that called Mr. Raoul the leader of paganism. When I taxed her with being a liar, she tore into me. The old bag of bones, with her skinny face and her buck teeth, she is a good picture of Antichrist herself. 'Father Cornelius was softening the corns on his poor feet in a basin of luke-warm water,' she said, 'when he told me that Mr. Raoul St George was the ringleader of paganism in Manister.' To cap it all, Julia McNamara has now joined in the hunt. She's as busy as a ferret in a rabbit burrow, back-biting everybody at the Lodge. Even though it's well known that she is a little touched in the head, she has influence with the young people, on account of her connections with the Fenians."

"Then it is quite serious, this scandalmongering," said Elizabeth, becoming agitated.

"It might become a calamity," Ahearn said, "unless Mr. Raoul gives up having anything to do with the Committee, before it's too late. I know the people inside out. To-day they are cheering Mr. Raoul, but only in the hope of getting something out of him, lower rents, or maybe no rents at all. When the English move to put down the agitation, it will be a different story. The people will turn their backs on Mr. Raoul and run for help to Father Costigan. Then the master will be blamed for any bad thing that may happen. Father Costigan knows the people just as well as I do, Miss Elizabeth. He is as shrewd as they make them. He is staying quietly in the background now, waiting for the tide to turn. In the meantime he is planting a few seeds of suspicion by means of scandalmongering. Those seeds will bear fruit at the right moment. He's a shrewd man, Father Costigan."

"Dear me!" cried Elizabeth. "How can people be so cruel to one another? My brother is so generous. He wants to make everybody happy, all at once, in the way over-generous people do. This generosity gets him into most unfortunate situations. Dear me! How could an upright man like Father Cornelius be guilty of such questionable intrigue?"

"Sure, he has to defend his bread and butter," said Ahearn. "You can't blame him."

"I do blame him," said Elizabeth indignantly. "It's outrageous."

"And that's not all," said Ahearn. "You thought that O'Dwyer was gone for good. Now didn't you?"

Elizabeth put her hand to the brooch at the neck of her dress. She looked terribly afraid.

"Don't tell me that he has returned," she whispered.

"He has, then," said Ahearn. "I saw him land at the pier a

little while ago, in a *pucaun* that belongs to Pat Lynch of Grealish Island."

Elizabeth stood very erect, controlled her emotion with an effort of will and then looked haughtily at Ahearn.

"Thank you for telling me all this, Tim," she said coldly. "You may go now."

Ahearn made a little curtsy and walked away.

"Dear God!" Elizabeth prayed with her eyes closed. "Help me to protect those I love from all evil influence."

Since O'Dwyer's disappearance a fortnight ago, she had felt completely recovered from the nervous shock that she suffered on the day of the shooting. She felt during the interval that life was again reverting to the peaceful routine that preceded her brother's return. Now her brightening horizon had suddenly darkened once more.

She tried to feel angry with Ahearn for this sudden darkening.

"The drunken rascal!" she said, as she watched him go along the wagon trail. "For twenty years he has twisted me round his little finger, doing just what he pleased with himself and the farm. He is furious at having to keep himself clean and sober since Raoul's return."

Then she raised her skirts and hurried up the steeply rising garden to the house.

"I must talk to Raoul," she muttered. "He must resign at once from that Committee and forbid the house to O'Dwyer."

The air now felt chilly. The rustling of the leaves had become sinister. Clouds raced across the sky. The surface of the ocean had broken into serried ranks of waves, whose crests were capped with foam.

CHAPTER XV

LETTICE LOOKED TERRIBLY UNHAPPY as she leaned against a pillar by the outer rim of the terrace. The rising wind was blowing a tress of her red hair across her hollow cheek. She had become even paler during the past fortnight.

"Where is your father, Lettice?" said Elizabeth, panting as she came on to the terrace after her climb. "I must see him at once."

"He's gone to the village," Lettice said. "He has been gone for hours."

"I have most important things to discuss with him," Elizabeth said as she sat down on a wicker chair.

"What about, Lizzie?" Raoul said, coming on to the terrace at that moment from the living-room. "What do you want to discuss?"

"Oh! There you are, Raoul," said Elizabeth. "It's about the Committee."

Raoul put his hands to his ears as he crossed the terrace.

"I beg of you not to talk to me about the Committee," he said in a tone of disgust.

He threw himself wearily on to another chair and stretched out his legs.

"I'm exhausted after arguing with those duffers for the past two hours," he said.

"Poor father!" Lettice said as she hurried across the terrace towards the living-room. "I'll go at once and order you some tea."

"Adorable child!" Raoul said. "It's the very thing I want."

He turned towards Elizabeth after Lettice had gone and added:

"It's humiliating to learn that one has no capacity for leadership. I am too decadent. These people have been slaves for so long that they only respond to the most primitive forms of persuasion. Father Costigan uses a blackthorn stick. Alas! I'm quite incapable of using such a weapon, and logical argument, I find, is completely worthless. Lizzie, they despise me."

He put his fingers to the tip of his beard and laughed heartily for a moment. Then he became serious again.

"For thirty years," he said, "I held that thought and observation were the only absolute forms of rational existence. I regarded all action as reprehensible, since it interfered with reverie. Then I suddenly decided to become a man of action. I have found it impossible."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," Elizabeth said, "because you must resign from the Committee at once."

"That's impossible," Raoul said.

"Why?" said Elizabeth.

"In the first place," said Raoul, "it's beneath my dignity. Secondly, this is my last chance to justify myself. Man is a social animal. He has a duty to society. Unless he fulfils it he feels ashamed of himself. I have always been a vain man, Lizzie. That you probably know. I mistook my intelligence for genius. I gave up my career at the Bar and went to Paris, to become a writer. Alas! I was able to write nothing of greater importance than articles for American newspapers. Then I turned my mind to other things. After years of study, I am convinced that I have

produced a weapon that can make tyranny impossible in the future. All that is necessary, I feel, is to let humanity realise its power. That can only be done by actual experiment. Ah! If only O'Dwyer . . ."

"A weapon?" Elizabeth said in horror. "Do you really mean that you are now manufacturing weapons?"

"Poor Lizzie!" Raoul said with feeling. "It's not really a weapon that one could see or touch. It is a method of resisting tyranny."

"Whatever it is," cried Elizabeth, "you must drop it at once. Father Costigan has launched a most dangerous intrigue against you. He is covering the parish with reports that you are the Antichrist."

"Really?" said Raoul, sitting up in his chair. "How amusing!"

"For your daughter's sake, if not for mine or your own," cried Elizabeth urgently, "don't joke about such a serious matter."

"Joke?" cried Raoul. "How can you use such a word?"

"Resign at once," Elizabeth insisted with her whole energy.

Lettice came on to the terrace at that moment, after having ordered tea. She halted abruptly and looked at her aunt haughtily.

"You have no right to speak to my father like that," she cried.

Elizabeth started, looked at Lettice in astonishment, turned pale and lowered her gaze.

"How could you allow yourself to be guilty of such rudeness?"

Raoul cried angrily. "Apologise to your aunt at once."

"Please, forgive me, Father," Lettice said gently, blushing to the roots of her hair.

Then she stood in front of Elizabeth and curtsied in a most elaborate fashion.

"I forgive you, darling," Elizabeth said when the gesture had been completed.

Yet she did not raise her eyes to look at Lettice.

"That's better," Raoul said to his daughter. "I'm going to forbid your having anything further to do with the village women, if I notice a deterioration of your manners."

Lettice came over and perched on the arm of his chair. She put her fingers through his hair.

"I promise you that I'm never going to be guilty again," she said, "but my work in the village is not responsible for this instance of rudeness. On the contrary, Father, I find my work among the women to be most exalting. It's wonderful what the Committee has done already for the people. There is laughter and singing everywhere, not only in the village, but in the

countryside. People who hadn't spoken to one another for years are friends once more. Even the most lowly and destitute have been exalted in spirit by the belief that freedom from tyranny is at hand."

"When bees revolt against the inability of their old hive to give adequate expression to their needs," Raoul said, "they do not waste time in singing and dancing. The swarm builds a new hive at once. Alas! The people of Manister are completely devoid of the bee's organisational ability. Dear Lettice! I find lyrical enthusiasm just as exalting as you do, but I prefer organisation at certain moments. This is one of those moments."

"Please don't worry, Father," Lettice said. "Even if nothing came of the Committee but a few days of singing and dancing . . ."

"If only that wretched O'Dwyer had not deserted me," Raoul interrupted. "He has power over these fellows. The young men have the same faith in him that monks have in God. They refuse to help me without orders from him. Even though he has behaved in this shabby way, they are not in the least critical of him. I can't understand how a man can have such power over others and yet behave like an irresponsible idiot."

"Raoul," cried Elizabeth in a shrill tone, "you must resign at once."

"What's the matter now, Lizzie?" Raoul said quietly. "You look upset."

Elizabeth got to her feet.

"There is no time to lose," she cried. "Go and tell these people . . ."

Her voice drifted away into silence. She stood with her lips parted, her head turned a little to one side, listening intently. Both Raoul and Lettice also got to their feet and stood listening.

"Can it be possible?" Raoul said.

They heard a man whistling a hornpipe called "The Black-bird." There was no mistaking the voice or the tune. O'Dwyer invariably whistled that tune as he approached the house on his nightly visits to Raoul's study.

"Let God's will be done," Elizabeth said as she heard footsteps on the gravel of the drive.

She walked over to the outer edge of the terrace.

"This solves my problem," Raoul said, putting his arm around his daughter's waist.

"Oh! Father!" Lettice whispered, clasping her hands before her lips.

Father and daughter hurried from the terrace into the living-room.

"It is now too late to interfere," Elizabeth said as she looked towards the sea. "She has already fallen in love with him."

An occasional drop of rain had begun to fall, making dark stains on the flagstones at the rim of the terrace floor. The wind had died down. It was getting dusk.

"I have been so stupid and narrow-minded," she said aloud, while tears gathered in her eyes. "I have set myself up in judgment over those whom I love."

There was a knock at the hall door. Then the door was thrown open. She heard O'Dwyer speak. Raoul and Lettice also began to speak at the same time. There was a peal of ringing laughter from Lettice.

Elizabeth bowed her head and clasped her hands before her mouth.

"I am being punished by her laughter," she said.

The wind swept up from the sea once more and there was violence in its rush. The clouds burst, loosening a torrent of rain upon the earth. There was a continuous roar among the trees, as the countless drops pressed down upon the outspread leaves, that trembled and swayed under the weight of ever-falling water. The air became heavy and drunkening, as the earth's pores opened to receive the moisture.

Elizabeth threw back her head, closed her eyes and let the rain beat against her face. Her warm tears mingled with the cool rain-drops. She felt purified by the rain, as if it were the water of baptism making her holy.

"I'm going to learn from her how to love the people," she whispered with her eyes closed. "Then I may be able to share in her laughter."

CHAPTER XVI

RAOUL FINISHED READING THE documents that Michael had given him.

"This Bodkin seems to be quite a remarkable ruffian," he said. "You say he is Father Kelly's brother-in-law?"

"Yes," Michael said. "Father Kelly lives with him. That's why it's so hard to know what to do. I don't want to make Father Kelly suffer any more. He has suffered enough already."

"Of course, you know that Butcher wanted you to kill Bodkin?" Raoul said.

"Naturally," Michael said. "I knew that at once."

He suddenly leaned forward and looked at Raoul fixedly.

"Yet I nearly killed Bodkin," he added, "in spite of knowing it was a trap set by Butcher."

"Really?" said Raoul. "Tell me about it."

"After leaving the eating-house," Michael said, "we went to a cottage belonging to an old man that does a lot of work for our organisation. We got him out of bed and sent him out to get the lay of the land. He came back in a few hours and told us all we wanted to know. District Inspector Fenton had put a guard of two men in civilian clothes on Bodkin's tavern. One covered the front, from a house across the street. The other was in a shed, overlooking the rear entrance. There is an underground passage, though, that the police didn't know about, so they left it unguarded. The old man led us to this underground passage the following night and we came up through a trap-door behind the bottom of the stairs in the tavern room. There we came upon a scene that astonished all of us. We saw Father Francis and Bodkin, dressed only in their small shirts, kneeling on the flagstones side by side, holding hands like children and praying to a crucifix that stood on the table before a lighted lamp."

"Astounding!" Raoul said. "What was the time?"

"A little after one o'clock in the morning," Michael said. "What made it all the more strange is the fact that Bodkin has injured Father Francis terribly. His sister Penelope, who was married to Bodkin, died a few years ago. Bodkin used to beat her unmercifully. It's generally agreed that she died as a result of the beatings he gave her. Father Francis was very fond of Penelope. No wonder, because it was she saved his life when they were left orphans at the time of the famine. She raised him and paid for his education until he was ordained. You can imagine how he must have loved her. Yet there he was, kneeling hand in hand with the man that killed her. You have to love a man before you kneel hand in hand with him, at dead of night, in front of a crucifix."

"Quite true," Raoul said.

"There are other things about Bodkin," Michael continued, "that are almost as bad as his spying and his cruelty to his wife. The man is a miser. He won't spend a penny except to satisfy his gluttony. Even at that, he'll buy only the very cheapest food. In fact, he rarely buys any at all, because people from the country bring him presents of food. Neither will he employ a man to help him behind the bar, in spite of the fact that he has been ailing for years. An old woman comes in one day a week to do the scrubbing. She has to fight a pitched battle with him every time for

her wages. Father Francis does whatever cooking is required. No matter how you look at it, it's an incredible story."

"What did you do?" Raoul said.

"What could we do?" said Michael. "We went away again, of course, without doing anything at all."

"What did you intend to do?" Raoul said.

"I intended to kill Bodkin," Michael said simply.

"In spite of knowing it was a trap?" said Raoul.

"There are things a man can't help doing," Michael said.

Raoul got to his feet, walked around the table and then halted in front of Michael's chair, over by the window of the study.

"But that was a fortnight ago," he said. "Where have you been since?"

"We went to the island of Grealish," Michael said. "We spent most of the time hunting seals, there and on another island near there."

Raoul suddenly lost his temper. He drew himself to his full height and glared at Michael.

"Does it not occur to you that you owe me an apology?" he said.

Michael returned Raoul's stare. His eyes glittered.

"No," he said quietly. "It never occurred to me."

"Why not?" Raoul cried.

"I have never apologised to any man in my life," Michael said.

The two men stared at one another in silence for a little while. Then Raoul shrugged his shoulders and began to pace the floor.

"Forgive me for losing my temper with you," he said at length. "I'm showing the same lack of self-control for which I have been cursing you during the past fortnight."

He halted again in front of Michael and put his fingers to the tip of his beard.

"By the way, why did you come back?" he said.

Michael now looked embarrassed. He even flushed slightly through his tan, averted his eyes and shuffled his feet.

"I can't tell you that," he muttered. "I'd rather you didn't ask me."

"Very well," Raoul said, returning to his seat behind the table. "What do you want me to do about these?"

He pointed to the documents.

"Nothing," Michael said with a shrug of his shoulders. "Do what you please with them. I have no use for them. I just showed them to you, in order to explain what had happened to me during the past fortnight."

"You no longer want to kill Bodkin?" Raoul said.

"No," Michael said. "I'm no longer angry with him. He was only a tool."

"He incited your father to stage the attack in which Butcher was wounded and his steward killed," Raoul said. "He procured weapons for the attackers. Then he furnished Butcher with a minute account of the plans. Yet you want no revenge on him."

"No," Michael said. "I only want revenge on Butcher. He alone was responsible."

"Bodkin spied on the Fenians for the English Government," Raoul continued calmly. "He spied on the tenants for the landlords. A loathsome creature. There could not possibly be anybody in the whole country that would pity him. These documents, with which we have been conveniently supplied, are decisive proof of his guilt. Therefore, he is ideal for our purpose."

Michael started.

"What do you mean?" he said angrily.

"I mean that we are going to isolate this Bodkin," Raoul said. "We are going to test the efficacy of our weapon against this repulsive target."

Michael jumped to his feet, pressed his fists against his thighs and cried in a loud voice:

"You can't do it."

"Why not?" Raoul said.

"Because of Father Kelly," Michael said.

"Very well," Raoul said calmly. "Take your documents and go. Our association is at an end."

He pushed the little pile of documents away from him across the table slowly with a pencil. Michael took a pace towards the table. Then he halted, shrugged his shoulders and returned to his chair. He sat down, drew his hands down over his face and shook himself.

"I had to come back," he said. "My world has changed in the past few months. It could never again be what it was. I'm ready to do whatever you want."

"Excellent!" Raoul said in a low voice. "May I have your word of honour that you are going to obey me in future?"

"I give you my word of honour," Michael said. "What do you want done with Bodkin?"

"The soldier, the poet and the monk," Raoul said, "must be ruthless with their own emotions and indifferent to those of others, when in pursuit of their ideal."

CHAPTER XVII

THE TAVERN FLOOR WAS SUNK below the street. A narrow channel ran between the house wall and the roadway. The lower part of the window gave on to the wall of the channel. The upper third was obscured by the heavy rain and by the feet of marching men. The rain and the marching feet, hindering the entry of light through the narrow slit of glass, produced an atmosphere of gloomy twilight in the sunken room, even though it was one o'clock of an afternoon in June.

The marching feet made a living frieze across the top of the window. They did not march in unison, like the feet of soldiers obedient to a single will. Each foot, clad in a hob-nailed boot that was splashed with mud, struck the ground independently of all the others. The flagstones of the tavern floor re-echoed to the tramping. The window shook spasmodically in its frame. A paraffin lamp, hanging by a chain from the ceiling, dangled gently to and fro.

Now and again they shouted in disorder.

"Down with the landlords!" they cried. "Pay no rent!"

Michael Bodkin, the tavern-keeper, sat on a chair in the centre of the room. He was sixty-five years old, a large man fallen grossly into flesh. He had a brick-red complexion and small blue eyes that were slightly bloodshot. There was a bald patch at the top of his skull. A thick fringe of curly grey hair surrounded the bald patch, like an unfinished wreath. He wore trousers, a starched linen shirt with a fixed collar and long woollen stockings. On the right side of his fleshy throat there was a small scar, over which a clot of congealed blood had formed. He shifted his gaze slowly and at long intervals, hither and thither, examining those in the room. His breathing was loud and irregular.

He had not yet recovered from the physical shock of being seized. Three men rushed into his bedroom upstairs and laid hands on him, while he was putting the finishing touches to his face with the razor. It was then that the blade had slipped and nicked his throat. At first he thought they were robbers. Then he recognised William Flatley and knew that they were Fenians. So his cry for help remained unuttered, and he realised with horror that his secret had been at last discovered. Flatley told him to go downstairs. He wanted to obey, but found that he was unable to move his limbs. Deering and Kelly, who accompanied

Flatley, pushed him roughly forward. He collapsed when they touched him. His body hung limp between them, like that of a man newly dead. They cursed and made a seat under his buttocks with their crossed hands. In that way they were able to carry him downstairs, with Flatley supporting his head and shoulders from behind. He was given a nip of brandy after being seated in the tavern room. That enabled him to sit erect without support.

The room was crowded with members of the Fenian organisation. A schoolmaster named Anthony Cooney was handing round the documents relating to Bodkin's guilt. All the men read the documents handed to them without any change of expression. Father Kelly was sitting at an oblong deal table, by the wall opposite the counter. He had his arms on the board and his hands were hidden within the sleeves of his jacket. His eyes were closed and his features were contorted, as if by acute pain. Michael sat opposite the priest. He was staring at the ceiling intently.

What puzzled Bodkin most was the activity of some men, whom he heard go up and down the stairs, carrying things from the house.

"What in the name of God are those men stealing from me?" he kept saying to himself.

One of these men finally approached Michael and said:

"We have everything taken now."

Michael looked at Father Francis and said:

"All right, Father. You can be on your way now."

Father Francis jumped to his feet with startling suddenness and cried:

"I refuse to take part in this monstrous crime."

"Be on your way, Father," Michael said.

"I didn't have to read those documents," Father Francis cried, "to know what the unfortunate man had done. He himself confessed everything to me several months ago. He told me everything from beginning to end, even worse things for my heart to bear than what was written down in those documents. For he sinned terribly against my flesh and blood. God gave me strength to forgive him. We went on our knees together in this very room. I did penance with him, so he would be sure that I had forgiven him. Otherwise he might not have courage to continue in his repentance. It's not good for a sinner to feel himself alone. Especially such a sinner. And he did repent. Oh! Indeed, he did. He stopped taking their money, even though money was so important to him. It must have been terribly important to him, or else he wouldn't have betrayed everything for the few miserable

shillings they gave him every week. They threatened him, wanting him to go on working for them, but he refused. That was why they gave you these documents. They want revenge on him for deserting them."

"That's enough," Michael said. "We're in a hurry. You will be taken to where you choose to go. Follow these men."

Father Francis looked at Michael reprovingly and said:

"May God forgive you."

Then he walked towards the back door of the tavern.

"Father Francis!" Bodkin cried.

He finally realised what was happening. He tried to grasp the priest by the arm. Flatley forced him back into his chair.

"God have mercy on me!" he said.

Father Francis paused at the back door and said in a loud voice:

"One day you will all regret polluting what was holy, for it is only through love that all ideals can triumph."

Bodkin collapsed on his chair, overwhelmed by the realisation that Father Francis had been forcibly removed from the house. Flatley put the brandy bottle to the prisoner's lips. He revived after drinking some more of the spirits.

Anthony Cooney, the schoolmaster, now collected all the documents and put them in an envelope. Then he nodded to Michael.

"You have all read these documents," Michael said, addressing the Fenians. "Each man is to make their contents public in his district."

Then he got to his feet and said to Bodkin:

"You have been found guilty of treason and condemned to total isolation for the remainder of your life. The sentence will be carried out as from this instant."

Addressing the Fenians once more, he cried sharply:

"March out in silence. Make no noise of any kind. Disperse in small groups as arranged. Look sharp, everybody."

Intoxicated by the second drink of brandy, Bodkin felt arrogant as he watched the men walk hurriedly from the room. He got a false idea of the reason for their departure. He jumped to his feet, spread his legs and beat his chest with his fists.

"I knew ye wouldn't dare lay hands on me," he shouted. "I have the whole power of the British Empire at my back. Ho! I'm a proper man for ruffians like ye. I have the whole power of the British . . ."

His voice was drowned suddenly by a brass band that began to make music with all its instruments as it passed the window

outside. By the time its tumult had subsided, he was alone in the room.

"They're gone," he said in a whisper. "The cowardly devils didn't dare lay hands on me."

He went to the back door, opened it a little and peered along a flagged path, bound by tall whitewashed walls, that ran from the house to the river bank. Two men stared at him from the far end of the path. He closed the door quickly, locked it and put an iron bar across it.

"Isolation?" he said aloud, beginning to feel nervous. "What in the name of God does that mean?"

Then he turned his head to one side and said suspiciously:

"What were those men dragging with them from up above?"

He hurried upstairs. From the head of the landing he could see that the door of the little bedroom occupied by Father Francis was wide open. He walked over to it slowly and peeped into the room.

"God Almighty!" he gasped.

The room was completely empty. Father Francis followed a monastic routine, scrubbing the floor every morning. The bare planks were spotlessly clean. The white-washed walls were also naked and spotless.

"He's gone, sure enough," Bodkin muttered. "They took him away."

It was some time before he could muster enough strength to go downstairs.

"God Almighty!" he kept saying.

On the counter in the tavern room he found the bottle of brandy from which they had given him to drink. He took it over to the table and sat down. He drank copiously, took a deep breath and then drank a good deal more. He got dead drunk almost immediately. He leaned back in his chair, stretched out his hands across the table and smiled broadly.

"The whole power of the British Empire!" he said with extreme satisfaction. "Think of that now. The whole power of the British Empire!"

Now there were only stragglers passing the window. Their footsteps sounded hollow and unimportant. The rain had ceased. The sky was beginning to clear.

"Nobody dares touch me," Bodkin said with a sigh of pleasure, as he leaned forward. "Not while I have the whole power of the British Empire behind me."

He rested his right cheek on his crossed hands and closed his eyes.

"The whole power of the British Empire!" he whispered as he fell sound asleep.

Two stragglers passed the window in a great hurry. Then there was dead silence.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE PEOPLE HAD ASSEMBLED for the meeting in a large field north of Clash. They stood around a wooden platform, leaving a passage open at one point for the ceremonial arrival of their leaders. There was room for no more than half the crowd on the field itself. Late arrivals were forced to take up position on the mountain slopes that rose sharply on three sides.

Now there was brilliant sunshine. The rain-washed earth shone like a jewelled cloak that offers its stretched out beauty to the eye of God. A few tendrils of the spent clouds lingered, like torn veils, against the granite peaks of the mountains.

Each contingent was massed under the raised banner of its Committee. The green and gold banner of the Manister people was farthest up the slopes, since they were the very last to arrive.

"Bloody woe!" Annie Fitzpatrick said. "We're stuck up among the furze like wild goats."

"All the better, Annie," Lettice said excitedly. "The view is wonderful from here."

In spite of having walked all the way from Manister in the rain, she felt very happy. Michael had promised to join her at the meeting and take her home afterwards. It was to be her first time alone with him.

"Oh! Lord!" Annie Fitzpatrick said, looking down at the crowd in the field. "The whole of Ireland is here, or a good part of it. That's a fine thing, too, because the Archbishop ordered them to keep away. They came in spite of him. God help him, he's a doddering old man that they have to feed with a spoon like an infant. Even so, he had no right to denounce Parnell and Davitt."

"The Archbishop is sold to the Devil," an old man shouted.

"I'm afraid you're right, old man," Annie said. "The bishops and the rich parish priests are on the side of the landlords. They condemn the Fenians, saying it's a mortal sin to take an oath on entering a secret society. Oho! Bad cess to them, they don't condemn the oath that poor boys take when they join the English

army. It's only when our lads take an oath to fight for Ireland that it becomes a sin in the eyes of the Church."

"True for you, Annie," the people shouted. "True for you, *alannah*."

Excited by their encouragement, Annie threw back her heavy shawl and put her hands on her hips.

"Shame on the Church for denouncing Michael Davitt, the defender of the poor," she cried. "Didn't the English persecute him enough, without the bishops taking a hand in the game? The English put arsenic in his food while he was in jail. Now the bishops are poisoning people's minds against him, just because he is trying to organise the farmers against the landlords. Down with the bloody bishops!"

There was a wild yell of approval of her words. People who had no idea at all of what she had said joined in the yelling. Then a small boy, perched on a stone wall, put his cupped hands in front of his mouth and shouted that the leaders were on their way from the town.

"Hurrah!" the people shouted, as those on the slopes caught sight of the procession. "Up, Parnell! Up, Davitt!"

A large troop of horsemen, followed by a long line of gaily painted carriages, advanced rapidly along the level road from the town to the field. A throng of ragamuffins and children, running full tilt, brought up the rear. A force of Constabulary, to the number of one thousand, and fully armed, were drawn up on the road, on either side of the entrance to the meeting place. They had, no doubt, intended to awe the rebellious multitude by their weapons and their discipline. Instead of that, they merely served as a guard of honour for the arrival of the notables.

"Hurrah for Parnell! Hurrah for Michael Davitt!" the great throng roared as the leaders came through the field to the platform.

Annie Fitzpatrick was now in an advanced state of mystical hysteria. Trembling from head to foot, she waved her arms above her head and screamed at the top of her voice. Her shawl had fallen to the ground. Her eyeballs protruded. There was froth about her lips. Perspiration ran down her cheeks.

"Up, Parnell! Up, Davitt!" she chanted with monotonous regularity.

Lettice was unaffected by the hysteria of the multitude. Even while she looked towards the platform with a look of rapture in her eyes, as Davitt began to speak, she was waiting anxiously to hear the voice of the man she loved.

"To confiscate the land of a subjugated people," Davitt cried

passionately as he gesticulated with his solitary arm, "and bestow it on adventurers is the first act of uprighteous conquest, the preliminary step to the extermination or servitude of an opponent race. The landlord garrison that England established in this country, centuries ago, is to-day as true to the object of its foundation as when it first cursed our soil."

Lettice suddenly felt a touch on her arm. Then she heard Michael whisper her name close to her ear. She turned swiftly and saw him bending over her. He was smiling in a way that made her heart stop beating. He took her by the hand and bade her follow him. They went farther up the slope through the crowd. Soon they were alone and the voice of the speaker down below in the field became indistinct. Then they rounded a shoulder of the mountain and the whole multitude was lost to view. There were only the grey houses of the town far away below, the sparkling sea and the mountains.

He suddenly took her in his arms against a moss-covered rock and almost shouted at her, with his lips close to her lips:

"Oh! God! I tried to go away, but I had to come back. I had to come. So help me God, I love you. I had to come back."

Then their lips met. She closed her eyes and swooned as the key was turned, admitting her to the fairyland of love.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GREY STALLION RAN at full speed across the flat bog that stretched from the head of the mountain trail to the lake shore. Hardened by the violence of the summer heat, the naked brown earth re-echoed like a drum to the rhythmic beating of the steel-shod hooves. A curtain of swirling dust marked the fierce passage of the horse.

Barbara drew rein sharply by the water's edge, bringing the stallion almost to his haunches. Then she leaped to the ground and dropped the reins. The stallion righted himself, neighed in fright and set off along the shore at a canter. Crazy by the heat and by the furious pace at which he had been driven up the mountain, he could not contain himself. A cloud of smoke rose from his sweating flanks. There was foam on his bridle, along his trailing reins, under his belly and about his crupper. He neighed again and wheeled away from the lake. He galloped back the way he had come, raising another curtain of dust parallel with the

first. He had begun to descend the mountain trail once more when the groom caught him.

Barbara looked across the lake towards a heather-covered rock that rose a few feet above the far shore. Her face was flushed and tense.

"You shouldn't have ridden him that hard," the groom said in a reproving tone as he trotted across the bog on an elderly roan mare, leading the stallion by the reins. "He's a very nervous animal, ma'am. You could do him a great deal of harm by driving him hard up a mountain road on a hot day like this."

"Do the people really believe this lake is enchanted?" Barbara said with her back turned to him.

"They do, ma'am," the groom said as he jumped lightly from the saddle.

"Do you believe it, Andrew?" Barbara said.

"It's hard to go against what everybody says," Andrew replied.

Barbara turned towards him abruptly. They looked at one another in silence. Then Andrew turned away his eyes and put his fingers under the edge of the sweating stallion's saddle. The animal started violently, whinnied and pushed against the mare.

"Whoa!" the groom said in a tender whisper. "Easy now, darling. Easy."

Barbara again looked across the water and said:

"Would you be afraid to swim over to that rock with me, Andrew?"

Andrew glanced towards the rock. Then he continued to caress the stallion without making any reply.

"You would be afraid," Barbara said in a slightly contemptuous tone. "Is that so?"

"They say it's enchanted water," Andrew said gently.

"What does that mean?" Barbara said.

"It means that this lake is supposed to have no bottom," Andrew said.

"Do you believe that?" Barbara said.

"They say a swimmer would surely sink forever through its black water," he said. "That's why no one ever dares to put foot in it."

"Then you are really afraid of swimming across it," Barbara said.

"I'm afraid of nothing, ma'am," Andrew said. "I'm just telling you what the people say."

"You wouldn't tell me what the people say," Barbara said, "unless you were afraid."

"What the people say is generally true," Andrew said. "There is always wisdom at the back of what they say, no matter how foolish it may seem to be at first sight."

"You are making excuses just because you are ashamed of being afraid," she said in a nagging tone.

"I'm not afraid," Andrew cried in a voice that had suddenly thickened with passion.

Barbara pointed with her whip towards a group of tall rocks that stood a little distance to the right.

"Let the horses rest behind those rocks, Andrew," she commanded.

She waited until he was out of sight. Then she ran in the opposite direction. Crouching behind a boulder, she began to undress in great haste. When she was naked, she unloosed her hair and let it fall down her back to its full length. Then she entered the water. It was very shallow for about five yards, barely reaching above her ankles. Then the ground disappeared suddenly from beneath her feet, just as if it had been removed by enchantment. She gasped and began to swim. The shallow water had been warm. Here in the deep it was ice cold. She could hardly breathe because of the cold, as she struck out with all her strength towards the far shore.

Presently she heard Andrew call to her.

"For God's sake, ma'ma," he cried, "come back here."

She continued to swim without paying any heed to him.

"Are you out of your mind?" he continued, raising his voice. "Come back before it's too late."

She stood up in the water and turned towards him.

"Come with me to the far shore," she said.

Andrew waded across the narrow strip of shallow water. He halted by the edge and shouted at her through his cupped palms.

"Come back in God's name," he said.

Barbara tossed her head and laughed. Then she stretched out her arms and legs, shook wide her hair and floated with her face to the sun. She arched her bosom, so that her tawny breasts rose clear above the water. The dark nipples glistened.

Enraged by this wanton gesture, Andrew shook his clenched fist at her.

"You insane woman!" he shouted. "You need to have the rod laid to you."

Barbara laughed again. Then she paddled with her arms and legs, churning the black water into foam.

"Laugh, you devil," Andrew yelled as he raced back to shore. "I'll soon change your tune."

When she saw him undress in frenzied haste, she turned and continued to swim. As she advanced towards the cliffs that towered above the far side of the lake, the movement of her limbs began to sound loud in the stillness.

She was halfway across when she again heard him shout.

"I'll teach you never again to torment a man," he said.

She glanced back over her shoulder. He was wading slowly through the shallow water, holding both hands in front of his person. The beautiful lean symmetry of his naked body made her swallow with delight. His trunk looked very white against the blackness of his hair and the brown tan of his bony face. He made the sign of the Cross on his forehead before plunging into the deep.

"You devil of a woman!" he shouted as he began to swim.

Barbara reached the far shore a good distance ahead of him. Gasping for breath, she climbed on to the rock and threw herself backwards among the half-resisting branches of the heather. A wide shaft of sunlight, coming through a cleft in the towering peaks, poured down upon the rock. The heather was warm and sweet-smelling.

She stretched out her arms and legs, closed her eyes and listened to the panting rush of Andrew's body towards her through the water.

CHAPTER XX

STAPLETON WAS CLEARING THE TABLE with leisured dignity when Neville suddenly began to abuse him in a most rude fashion.

"Don't spend the whole night collecting a few crumbs, you dolt," Neville said. "I'm getting to hate the very sight of you."

The butler recoiled visibly, like an ass that feels the sting of a sharp blow on his hide. He stood still for a moment. Then he continued to brush the table, hurriedly and without dignity.

"You are becoming utterly incompetent," Neville continued as he reached across the table for the decanter of port. "You have even become slothful. You have been in Ireland too long. All English servants degenerate after a certain time in this country. One should change them ever so often, just like one's linen. You had better pull yourself together, my man, or else pack your things at once. I don't tolerate inefficiency."

The butler finished gathering the crumbs. Then he bowed humbly to his master.

"Sorry to disappoint you, sir," he said in a frightened tone. "I'll do my best to remedy . . ."

"How dare you take on an injured air?" Neville interrupted as he struck the board with the heel of his fist. "Clear out at once."

Stapleton almost bolted from the room. He had seen Neville horsewhip other servants as a result of even more trivial incidents than this one. He closed the door behind him ever so gently. Then he ran on tip-toe all the way to the pantry.

"Are you annoyed about something, Neville?" Barbara said, pushing her empty glass towards him.

He filled her glass without looking at her. In fact, he had not looked at her even once during the meal.

"I have every reason to be annoyed," he said.

Barbara raised her glass and then lowered it again before it had touched her lips. She looked unhappy and ashamed of herself. It was a mood that made her cruel face somewhat kindly and even gentle.

"You are annoyed about the grey," she said.

"I told you several times to be careful with him," Neville said.

"I'm terribly sorry," said Barbara. "Do you think he is seriously hurt?"

"Andrew hasn't been able to cool him off yet," Neville growled, "but I think he'll be all right in a day or two. He's a bundle of nerves, that animal. Otherwise, he'd be a champion. Should geld him, I suppose. Damn the grey, in any case. I've more important things to worry about. I don't like the way that groom looked at me when I entered the stables. He's become surly. A fellow like him cowered before a gentleman until recently. Now he has the effrontery to look me straight in the eye, just as if he considered himself my equal. It's the spirit of rebellion that is sweeping the country. Even our servants have become rebels."

Barbara leaned far back in her chair, stared at the far wall, raised her glass with a quick turn of her wrist and took a sip. Then she sighed deeply.

"You are beginning to suspect everybody," she said. "Sometimes I even think that you suspect me."

Neville looked at her steadily for a little while. Then he shook his head.

"I don't suspect you," he said gloomily. "I never had any illusions about you. I know that you never even liked me. You married me for your own convenience. One can't suspect a person about whom one has no illusions."

"You are in a peculiar mood to-night," Barbara said.

"I'm not complaining," he continued. "I've never asked for

sympathy from anybody. I don't ask for it now, when the going is beginning to get a little rough. I'm not even complaining because you took advantage of my broken ribs to take a separate bedroom. I make no demands on you, not even that you should behave towards me with common decency."

"Did you have a lot to drink in Clash to-day?" Barbara said.

"Fenton and I did drink a great deal of whisky," he said.

"Are you planning another murder?" Barbara said.

Neville stared at her angrily and said:

"None of that, Barbara. Do you understand? I'm in no mood for it."

He shrugged his shoulders, emptied his glass abruptly and then refilled it. His hand shook as he poured the wine from the decanter.

"Fenton is cracking up," he said after a long silence. "The Bodkin affair has been too much for him. Confound the fellow! His cowardice is bound to get me into trouble."

"Surely, you can't blame him," Barbara sneered, "for having the instincts of a gentleman."

"You insult the word gentleman," Neville said. "He is beneath contempt. He went on and on about his wrecked career and his conscience, just as if he held me responsible for his failure to cope with his own weakness. In fact, he was downright hostile to me at first, when I called on him at his chambers. At one stage in the proceedings, he had the effrontery to jeer at me quite openly, because certain arrangements of mine had miscarried."

He chuckled and then added with great satisfaction:

"He thought that he had me in a corner and that he could gloat over me, but I soon brought him to his senses. He cracked up almost at once when I took him over to Bodkin's tavern. It was really a disgraceful exhibition. Frankly, it's not a pretty sight when an Englishman . . ."

"What was there at Bodkin's tavern?" Barbara said in a very hostile tone.

Neville had been slouching over the board. Now he sat up rigidly and pulled back his shoulders. His eyes became very sharp.

"I wish I knew exactly," he said. "There's more to it than meets the eye. On the surface, there is only an elderly man, who formerly did intelligence work of a menial sort for the Government, living alone, cut off from all intercourse with his kind, slowly going insane. It's not a pretty sight. Yet the shocking part is what cannot be seen or even described. You have to feel this sort of thing in order to understand it. You can only feel it by being where it's happening. Of whom and of what is the fellow afraid? He won't speak. We know that a number of men came to

his tavern during Parnell's meeting, three weeks ago last Sunday. Yet he refuses to say what transpired during their visit. It's uncanny. I never experienced anything like this in Ireland. We could buy anybody in the blasted country for a pound note until now. The Fenians have the people terrorised. The changed behaviour of the Fenians is also very odd. They used to be harmless idiots, who liked to play at being conspirators. Now they are off on a new tack, interfering with government and making things difficult for us in every way they can. Not a soul has come into the tavern since the day of the Parnell meeting, except for the Constabulary and myself. Bodkin emerged only once, to visit a shop where he usually made his purchases. They absolutely refused to sell him any food. He told me that they looked at him just as if he had suddenly become a leper. He has remained indoors ever since. One of the constables takes him food, but he barely touches a morsel now and again. He's deliberately starving himself, or else he has lost his appetite through fear. When I asked him if there was anything I could do for him, he went on his knees to me and said: 'Send me Father Francis, your honour.' He referred to an unfrocked priest, a relative by marriage, that had been living with him for years. Fenton told me that he himself had been to see this priest two weeks ago at Bodkin's request. Oddly enough, he left the tavern on the day of the meeting and went to live in a stone hut up at Manister Head. He told Fenton, in so many words, to go to the Devil on being told of Bodkin's request. 'I have my own soul to save,' he shouted. They are all mad, the whole pack of them. Since then, according to Fenton, Bodkin seems to have given up all hope, even though he keeps begging everybody he sees to send him Father Francis."

"How perfectly horrible!" Barbara said.

"It's worse than that," Neville said. "It's a downright dangerous situation, when you consider that we are handcuffed by the timidity of our Government. Martial law is the only solution. We have no idea what is being plotted. We have lost all our usual sources of information. The people now shun the rural constables."

"Why on earth don't you pack up and go?" Barbara said passionately.

"Are you serious?" Neville said.

"You're a shrewd business man," Barbara continued. "You must know that the game you've been playing here in Ireland is no longer worth the candle. This lovely island has been stripped naked. It is now a horrible skeleton, picked clean by vultures like you."

Neville leaned towards her across the board and said:

"You insolent swine!"

"You've had your fair share of the flesh," Barbara said calmly. "You came here, on your own admission, with no more than the clothes you had on your back. You are now a man of substance. When I first married you, three years ago, you sent your cattle to market in England on ships that had been chartered specially by you. You often engaged whole trains on the railway. Those . . ."

"You insolent swine!" Neville said again, striking the table.

"Those days of high prices and enormous profits are gone," Barbara continued imperturbably. "Cattle are worth hardly more than their keep now. So why don't you go, while there is still time?"

"You are no better than a damned rebel," he shouted at her.

"You are getting afraid, Neville," Barbara said with a smile. "I see it in your eyes. You are losing control of yourself. You had better pack up and go before other people see that your eyes have become furtive and shifty."

"You are an insolent swine and a rebel," he cried, getting purple in the face.

"I'm proud of being a rebel," Barbara said as she pushed back her chair and got to her feet. "I've always been one. English people are not all thieves and marauders. Thank God! England has also given poets and rebels to the world."

He drained his glass as she walked to the door.

"Good night, Neville," she said as she closed the door after her gently.

"You insolent swine!" Neville said, picking up the decanter. "I'll see you all in hell before I retreat an inch."

He changed his mind as he was about to fill his glass. He hurled the decanter from him across the table. The wine belched from the rolling vessel, making dark islands on the white cloth.

CHAPTER XXI

FOUR DAYS LATER, NEVILLE DROVE into the village to preside at the monthly sessions of the parish court. On emerging from the demesne gate, he was surprised to find that there was hardly anybody in the square.

"What's the meaning of this?" he said to Hopkins, who sat opposite him in the carriage. "Where are the people?"

The tall, sallow-faced Cockney glanced in all directions without change of expression.

"Don't seem to be many here, sir," he said gloomily.

As a rule the square was crowded on court days, since the people regarded the petty sessions as a form of entertainment; largely in the way that the theatre is regarded by townspeople. They came from far and near to enjoy the litigation, abandoning the most important work in order to be present at it. The little courthouse was packed from early morning. The overflow stood outside and had the proceedings relayed to them from mouth to mouth, according as they transpired.

To-day, however, there was only a small group standing in a forlorn fashion by the courthouse door. It consisted of the local police sergeant, three solicitors from Clash, Daggett, the process-server, and Fenton.

"I don't like the look of this, Hopkins," Neville said as the horses broke into a walk circling the monument. "It's Fenian ruffianism, I wager."

"Could be that, sir," Hopkins said.

At that moment, Tim Ahearn came running along the square from the direction of Manister Lodge. He ran so fast that he had reached the courthouse before the carriage came to a halt. He took up position to the left of the door, holding his hat high up against his left breast. Those present stared at him in surprise, since that was the position usually occupied by petitioners. His neat appearance also astonished them. He was wearing a good black suit, that had obviously been given to him by his master. It was of foreign cut and the coat reached half way down his thighs. He was clean-shaven and his whole face had been scrubbed so hard that it shone. His hair was heavily greased and carefully parted at the side.

He took a pace forward and made an awkward bow as Neville advanced to the courthouse door.

"Begging your honour's pardon," he said.

Neville looked at the fellow with suspicion. Usually there would be a dozen or more people standing here in a row to solicit favours. They would beg for a new roof to a barn, for seed potatoes, for a remittance of rent, or for the services of his prize bull. He was always generous to these petitioners. Having risen from a humble origin to a position of authority, it gave him intense pleasure to play the part of a feudal lord in public.

He knew very well, however, that Raoul's servant had not

come with the object of giving him either honour or pleasure. "What do you want?" he cried angrily. "State your business and look sharp."

Ahearn pulled a large white envelope from the inside breast pocket of his jacket, offered it to Neville and said:

"With the compliments of Mr. Raoul Henry St. George and may God spare your honour's health."

He thrust the envelope into Neville's hand and walked away hurriedly. After he had gone about five yards, he put on his hat, spat on his palms, hunched his shoulders and ran as fast as his powerful thighs could carry him.

"Where's everybody to-day?" Neville said as he tore open the envelope.

Sergeant Geraghty took a pace forward and glanced at Fenton, as if asking for permission to speak. Then he addressed Neville in a low and furtive tone.

"There is dirty work afoot, sir," he said. "All the people that were summoned to appear before you have been kidnapped during the night."

Neville had not heard a word of what the sergeant said. On opening the envelope, he discovered the documents relating to the guilt of Michael Bodkin. He lost colour and glanced at Fenton. The District Inspector had seen what was in the envelope. He was smiling faintly, as if politely enjoying the joke played on Neville by Raoul. Neville turned quickly to the sergeant.

"What did you say, Geraghty?" he said. "I asked you what has happened to all the people that are usually here."

"You did, sir," Geraghty said, "and I . . ."

"Allow me to explain," Fenton intervened. "It seems that those summoned to appear in court have been purloined during the night."

"Purloined?" said Neville.

"Looks like rebellion, Captain Butcher," said one of the solicitors from Clash.

"They were taken out of their beds by masked men," Sergeant Geraghty said.

Daggett, the process-server, an old soldier with a blotched red face, came smartly to attention and said to Neville:

"I served nine men and four women with a summons to appear. Every summons was properly served, sir, according to regulations."

"All we know, sir," Sergeant Geraghty added, "is about the four that live in the village here and two others a little way out on the east road. There is no sign of any of them. My men are out now in the country, investigating the others."

"Have you questioned the relatives of those taken?" said Neville.

"They won't say a word," Geraghty said.

"In my opinion, Captain Butcher," said another of the solicitors, "this is a Fenian conspiracy."

"Could I have a word with you in private?" Fenton said to Neville.

Neville glanced with hatred at the smiling face of the District Inspector. Then the two men walked up the flagged path leading to the little courthouse. It was a shabby, one-storied building, with grey mortar showing through the yellow paint on its front wall. Stephens, the petty sessions clerk, came forward with a troubled look on his face as they entered.

"Get outside," Neville said.

The clerk bowed and shuffled out of the court-room, closing the door after him softly.

"What the devil are you grinning at?" Neville said to Fenton when they were alone. "Last time I saw you, it was quite a different story."

Fenton now smiled broadly. There was a strange glitter in his eyes and he stood with his head thrown very far back.

"That was a long time ago," he said.

"Have you gone completely insane?" said Neville. "I saw you only four days ago. Have you forgotten already?"

"It was a very long time ago," Fenton said. "Now it's your turn."

"My turn?" said Neville.

"As far as I'm concerned," Fenton said, "there have been important developments that have materially changed the situation in my favour."

"What developments do you mean?" cried Neville angrily. "These kidnappings?"

"Just a moment," said Fenton. "I want to say a few words, first of all, about to-morrow's evictions. Pardon me. It's not the evictions to which I object, but the garden party that precedes them."

Neville was now staring at the District Inspector in horror, as if he really had become convinced of the man's insanity.

"It's a frightful mistake," Fenton continued, "a gross blunder, together with being in bad taste. It really is overstepping the mark, to invite the police to a garden party, to give them cakes and ale, prior to throwing unfortunate wretches out of their hovels. You may think that sort of bad manners is going to be mistaken for firmness by the Irish and that it will cow them.

Lord Mongoole may think so, too. If you do, I assure you that you are both wrong. Well! There it is. I've had my say, just for the fun of the thing."

He leaned back on his heels and laughed outright.

"Furthermore," he added, looking slyly at Neville, "I know what was in that envelope. St. George has a sense of humour. I must get to know the fellow."

Neville suddenly moved up close to the District Inspector's face and sniffed several times.

"I should have known," he said in disgust. "You're dead drunk."

Fenton's face became sombre. His eyes were now a trifle bloodshot. He began to sway backwards and forwards slowly.

"I used to be afraid of you, Butcher," he said. "Not any more, though. Not since this morning. It's odd that such a trifling development should make so much of a difference. Yet it definitely has done so."

"What are you talking about?" Neville said, now becoming very nervous. "Speak up before I lose patience with you."

"The Bodkin incident is closed since nine o'clock this morning," Fenton said in a casual tone.

"Closed?" said Neville. "How?"

"Not at all the way you wanted it to close," Fenton said. "He was found hanging from a hook in the ceiling of his tavern room at thirteen minutes past nine this morning. He appears to have stood on the table, removed the lamp, put a cord through the lamp ring, fixed the noose around his neck and jumped. Dr. Waldron examined the remains and said that he died at . . ."

"He's dead?" Neville interrupted.

"Quite dead," Fenton said. "You see, it makes a difference, as far as I'm concerned. Do you understand?"

Neville nodded several times. Then he suddenly grasped Fenton by the tunic with both hands.

"Blast your rotten soul to hell," he cried as he shook the District Inspector. "You're dead drunk when I need you most."

Then he looked into Fenton's eyes and added in a pathetic tone, as he let go the tunic:

"For God's sake, pull yourself together. Do you hear?"

Fenton swayed backwards on being released, almost losing his balance. He righted himself with difficulty, smiled faintly and then bowed.

"I grant you that I'm drunk," he said in a most friendly tone. "I've been drinking without interruption all morning. I'm as drunk as a lord."

CHAPTER XXII

THE TENT WAS OBLONG IN SHAPE. Five centre poles were required to sustain its spread of canvas. The skirts were raised, showing the taut peg ropes criss-crossed outside like the mooring threads of a spider's web. The cropped grass on the floor looked black, except where the sunlight entered below the skirts and made a clear-edged margin of green brightness. Up above, near the apex of the roof, there was a patch of canvas that seemed about to come apart. It was the full power of the noonday sun, coming through a gap in the tall trees of the demesne, that made the rugged cloth transparent at that place.

A long narrow table, set on high trestles, was laden with great quantities of meat and drink. Five men of Lord Mongoole's household staff distributed these victuals among more than two hundred guests. Three of the servants carried trays of beef and ham sandwiches. The other two carried buckets of ale. One hundred and fifty men of the Royal Irish Constabulary, the majority of them brought from other districts for the evictions, stood facing the table in orderly groups. They ate and drank with the sombre dignity of their profession. Their splendid physique and wholesome faces were in marked contrast with a group of civilians that stood to the rear. These latter men were convicts and town bullies, mainly recruited in the capital and carried around the country at Government expense to perform the more repulsive tasks connected with evictions. The people gave them the nickname of "the crowbar brigade," because the demolition of cabins was part of their duty. Their ghoulish faces were heavily scarred.

By the open doorway, where the carbines were stacked under guard, four officers stood chatting in subdued whispers. They were rosycheeked young Englishmen, very smart and gay in their dress uniforms. All four of them had been sent down quite recently from the training depot in Dublin, to serve with flying columns of this sort on special missions. They came to attention as Fenton strode into the tent.

"Seen my Head Constable?" Fenton enquired of them.

One of them pointed towards the far end of the refreshment table and said:

"There he is. The lucky dog is cheerfully wetting his rather large whistle with a quart of good ale."

Fenton beckoned to one of the men guarding the carbines.

"Send Head Constable Reilly here at once," he said after the man had approached.

The constable saluted and then trotted smartly down the tent, one hand on the empty scabbard of his side-arm.

"Awfully decent of Mongoole to give a party of this sort for the men," said another of the young deputy inspectors to Fenton. "Makes them feel that their work is appreciated. That sort of thing helps discipline."

Fenton's troubled eyes narrowed as he looked at the young man who had spoken.

"That's all rot," he said bitterly.

The young man looked puzzled and embarrassed.

"Oh!" he said in confusion. "I merely thought that . . ."

"Good idea not to think when you're on this sort of work," Fenton interrupted.

"I see," said the young man, now blushing deeply.

Head Constable Reilly, a thin man of great height with moustaches that reached out at least three inches on either side of his mouth in a perfectly straight line, came to a halt two paces from his superior. There he stood rigid as a post. His blue eyes were as keen and ruthless as those of a hawk.

"Yes, sir?" he said.

The four young officers looked at one another sheepishly as Fenton moved away to converse in private with the Head Constable. They had been put ill at ease by the boorish remarks of the District Inspector.

"Look here, Reilly," Fenton said in a low tone, "I want you to see that the men don't drink too much. We're going to have plenty of trouble to-day."

"Looks like it, sir, by all reports," Reilly said.

"Wouldn't do to have the fellows in any way groggy," Fenton said, "under the circumstances."

"You may rely on me, sir," Reilly said.

Then he inclined his head slightly towards the group of civilian rowdies, as he added in a somewhat contemptuous undertone:

"What about our friends beyond there? They are lowering the stuff by the gallon. I have no authority to stop them."

Fenton's face darkened.

"Let those swine drink until they burst, if they feel that way inclined," he cried in a tone of most unseemly passion.

Reilly's sharp blue eyes looked astonished. He had been twenty-seven years in the armed forces, partly as an infantry man

in the army. This was not the first time he had seen a man's nervous system reach the breaking point under heavy pressure. He cleared his throat loudly, took a short step to his rear, clicked his heels and saluted.

"Very good, sir," he said.

Fenton returned the salute and strode out of the tent, followed by the four deputy inspectors. The five men fell into line and marched across the close-cropped level sward, beneath tall trees, with long, rhythmic strides. Their lean, disciplined bodies moved in perfect unison. The metal of their helmets kept flashing in the sunlight. Out here in the open their uniforms looked black against the emerald grass and the grey bulk of Killuragh Castle that rose majestically in front.

"When you fellows have been a little longer in this country," Fenton said bitterly, after they had marched about twenty paces from the tent, "you will realise that it's useless making gestures of this sort towards the Irish."

"But I wasn't referring to the Irish," said the officer who had spoken about the party. "I was referring to our fellows."

"They're Irish, too," Fenton said. "They hate us, even though we have put them in uniform and made them swear allegiance to Her Majesty. They obey us as long as we pay them, but they hate us just the same."

He suddenly tugged at the collar of his uniform and added in a tone that was almost hysterical:

"I tell you they all hate us. All of them."

The four men glanced at him in the way the Head Constable had done. They were shocked by what they saw. They looked to their front again hurriedly, just as if they had inadvertently come upon something obscene. In their world, there was no provision made for the existence of personal tragedy.

Killuragh Castle was a building of great size, standing above a range of steep cliffs that overlooked the sea and the town of Clash. To the rear lay a broad, fertile plateau, bound by mountains to the east. It was not a house of beautiful design, like the Norman fortress that had preceded it on this site for many centuries, during the reign of the St. George family. In the course of one hundred years, however, the crude lines of the new castle had become endowed with romantic charm by the rains and the fierce blows of the Atlantic storms. Its walls were now half covered with ivy.

Having walked round the house, the officers entered an Italian garden through a small bronze gate that was set in a highly ornamented wall.

"I say!" cried one of the deputy inspectors. "What a marvellous place! Must have cost a barrel of money."

"Exactly as my father described it," said another with boyish excitement as he looked about him. "He visited Killuragh several times, when he was in Ireland with the Lancers."

The host and hostess received their guests beside a large pool, built of exquisite Connemara marble and filled with crystal-clear mountain water. They stood halfway up a row of steps that led to a band-stand.

"Come and see us any hour, day or night," Lord Mongoole said vaguely to each of the five men.

The fourth earl of that name was an insignificant little man of thirty-seven, with sad eyes, a sallow face, a bald crown and an exceptionally long nose. He had the harried look of a man that is in debt up to his ears. Of all the vast fortune that his great-grandfather had brought back as loot from India there was scarcely a sovereign left in ready cash. That was why he was now compelled to evict three villages of peasants, in order to get a few thousand guineas from Captain Butcher as down payment on a ninety-nine-year lease of their holdings. His wife was a lean woman of very ugly features, except for really beautiful grey eyes. She kept talking to another woman, in a high-pitched voice that was rather engaging, while she received the young men. She looked very smart in a black dress and a fine pearl necklace.

Fenton drifted away from his companions on reaching a marquee where champagne and a buffet lunch were being served by a large number of liveried servants. He took a glass of wine and drank it all, hoping to get rid of the horrible depression that had lain heavy on him since awaking that morning. The wine merely intensified his unhappiness by reminding him of his love for Barbara. Ever since his unfortunate interview with her at Manister House, he had tried to put her out of his mind. He now gave free rein to his passion once more, feeling that all was lost and that further effort was senseless.

"My love!" he whispered to himself in despair as he wandered about among the guests, hoping to catch sight of her. "My darling love!"

More than one hundred people had already arrived. Others kept coming in a steady stream. Like all the great landowners of that period, the Mongooles spent only a few days each year on their Irish estate. They came to Killuragh about this time each summer, gave a party for the local gentry and then returned to England. It was like an annual memorial service for a feudal system that was moribund. The local members of the English

"garrison" flocked to the castle for these receptions with the pathetic eagerness of provincials. They came dressed in finery that only saw the light on very exceptional occasions, for they were mostly people in somewhat modest circumstances. Here they were, moving about among the flowers and statues, or sitting under broad umbrellas at little tables, chattering like a flock of migratory birds that have settled to rest for a little while at some place alien to them. The perfumed dresses of the women, the bright uniforms of the Hussar and artillery officers of the district garrison, the elegant morning clothes of the landowners and officials gave an impression of aristocratic splendour against the background of the vast grey castle and its lovely garden.

Fenton had not gone far in search of Barbara when he was button-holed by the irascible Major Fitzwilliam, who had been so critical of the Government on the day of the ambush.

"Splendid!" Fitzwilliam said. "This sort of thing, I mean the invitation to the Constabulary, is exactly the gesture that we needed. Mongool has done the right thing. The rebels now know that one landowner at least is not timid. More power to him. We must be firm, all of us, in our respective counties. If the government were equally so, things would speedily improve. Why the devil don't you arrest Parnell?"

He turned aside to address an aged man that was walking past.

"Just a moment, Sir James," he said. "I'd like to have a word with you."

Sir James O'Connor-Kelly, the famous barrister, came over with his two granddaughters and nodded to Fenton. The two girls, dressed in identical blue frocks, ogled the handsome District Inspector as he bowed to them stiffly from the hips.

"Repeat that quotation from Parnell's speech at Clash," Fitzwilliam said to Sir James. "I mean those remarks that you told me were seditious just a few minutes ago."

"Delighted to repeat them," Sir James said, "especially to an officer of Constabulary."

He glared at Fenton, just as if he considered the District Inspector to be his personal enemy. Though now over eighty, he still looked formidable as a man. A great duellist in his early youth, his face bore three deep scars from having been slashed by sword thrusts.

"At Clash," he said, "Parnell made the following seditious statements: 'I advise you to stick to your farms. Don't let the English intimidate you by their threats. Let each one of you hold firmly to his plot of ground. Your physical courage is proverbial. Learn discipline and you will be invincible.'"

"Hear that?" Fitzwilliam cried in triumph to Fenton. "Every word of it is treason. It's a call to arms. Pure Fenianism."

"I quite agree with Fitzwilliam," Sir James said to Fenton. "Parnell should be put in jail. The whole country is rapidly becoming engulfed by the rebellion. He is chiefly responsible. A gentleman, Mr. Fenton, is always dangerous at the head of a lower-class uprising. St. George is another man that should be put in jail. In my humble opinion, he is quite as dangerous as Parnell. Perhaps even more dangerous, in the long run, because he is far more intelligent. Ideas can do incalculable harm. The evil that they do grows with the years, like an ever-spreading cancer."

"St. George is a rotter," cried Fitzwilliam in a most passionate tone. "I think jail is too good for that renegade. He should be horsewhipped and stoned out of the county."

Without making any reply to these remarks, Fenton bowed curtly and walked away. He heard the two old men indignantly criticise his manners as he passed out of earshot. He shrugged his shoulders.

"I no longer care what people say about me," he muttered.

Finding that Barbara had not yet arrived, he took up a position on the outskirts of the crowd to watch for the approach of her carriage. There was a break in the trees that lined the drive some distance away. He fixed his gaze on the strip of gravelled roadway visible at that point.

Presently he saw Butcher's pair of black carriage horses go prancing arrogantly past the open space, their forelegs arched high in the acquired movement of the trot. While the spinning yellow wheels followed the horses over the white gravel, he caught a glimpse of Barbara's head above the dark body of the carriage. A thrill of passionate delight passed through him as he saw her little black straw hat, with a white ostrich plume waving from it, perched gaily on the very brink of her forehead.

"My love!" he whispered. "Oh! My love!"

He waited, with wildly beating heart, until the carriage reappeared on the wide courtyard before the castle. The horses slackened pace as they circled a large flower-bed. Then they halted at a flick of the coachman's whip between two white-stockinged footmen, who stood on either side of the steps leading down into the garden. He rushed forward as she emerged from the carriage. He took up a position at a point that she would have to pass on her way to the host and hostess. As she came walking slowly towards him, down the long flight of broad steps, with her white-gloved hand on Neville's arm and her melancholy eyes

staring into the distance, he thought that he had never seen her look so beautiful.

"Oh! God!" he whispered. "How I love her!"

She glanced at him as she went past. Their eyes met. Although her expression did not change and her eyes remained half-closed, he felt certain that she had signalled to him, during the instant that they looked at one another. As a result, he passed at once from the depths of despair to a foolish height of happiness. With his knees trembling, he wandered down to a tiled path that ran parallel with the pool.

"Great God!" he muttered. "Suppose she really looked at me with tenderness! What then?"

He kept her in sight as she walked back and forth along the path. Soon his spirits began to sink once more, as the minutes passed and she made no effort to come in search of him. Indeed, she appeared to be unusually gay and talkative, laughing repeatedly as she went from one group to another of her friends, twirling her black lace parasol above her head like a flirtatious girl.

"It was just an illusion," he said to himself, as despair again gripped him. "I was deceiving myself. That was all."

Then he saw her come. She suddenly broke away from some people and walked towards him rapidly.

"Jim!" she said in a low voice as she approached.

He threw back his head, opened his lips and stared at her in rapture. It was the first time that she had ever addressed him by his Christian name and she was looking at him with tenderness. His own eyes grew dim with tears of joy.

"Do you forgive me?" she said.

"Barbara!" he whispered hoarsely.

"I was beastly to you," she said.

"Barbara!" he said again.

"You do forgive me," she said.

"There was never anything to forgive," he said.

"Walk with me a little way," she said. "There is something I must tell you. I have a confession to make."

They walked in silence along the path for a little way.

"Do you remember my telling you about a third fire?" she said at length.

"I remember," he said.

"That was a stupid thing to say," she said with emotion. "It was stupid and cruel. I'm terribly ashamed of myself. That fire is dead, shamefully dead."

He halted and turned towards her, drawing himself to his full height and bringing his heels together.

"For me everything is dead except my love for you," he cried.

"I wanted to hurt you," she said, "because I thought you were afraid of your love for me."

"I am no longer afraid," he said.

"Jim," she said, "I want you terribly."

"My darling!" he muttered, bending towards her.

She drew back and he restrained himself.

"We must be careful," she whispered. "I'll come to you as soon as possible. You'll wait?"

"Forever," he said.

"You do love me," she said. "Don't you?"

"My God!" he said. "Need you ask?"

"You'll let nothing stand in the way of our love?" she said.

"Nothing at all," he said.

"It won't be long," she said. "I can't endure this much longer. I'll come and prove my love. I'll prove it, Jim."

She touched his arm with her gloved hand, looked into his eyes intently and added:

"Wait for me. It will be as soon as possible."

Then she turned and walked away from him. Trembling and with his eyes on the ground, he stood listening to the rustle of her skirts. Then there was only the fragrance of her perfume. He raised his eyes and smiled foolishly.

"Great God!" he said aloud. "Great thundering God!"

He heard heavy footsteps come along the path. Raising his eyes, he saw Neville approach. Mr. George Sheehy, the Resident Magistrate in charge of carrying out the evictions, was shuffling along behind the landowner.

"Do you realise that we have only until to-morrow night before the writs expire?" Neville cried angrily from a distance. "We must get going at once. Didn't you hear they are organising resistance?"

"You had better get your men on the march at once," the Resident Magistrate said. "We are going to be pressed for time, if there is any trouble."

Fenton clicked his heels and said gaily:

"I'll proceed at once."

As he strode away to get the column on the march, he kept smiling happily. Even after he had mounted his horse and taken his place at the head of his men, he smiled as he gave the order to advance.

He had been carried beyond reach of reality.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE COLUMN MARCHED DUE EAST from Killuragh for a mile at a rapid pace over level road. All the land on either side had been cleared of peasants. There were only droves of cattle and the scattered cabins of their herds in the big stone-walled fields. It was very hot and there was not a single breath of wind. Clouds of white dust hung motionless above the road, like rumpled gauze, behind the marching feet and the turning wheels of the supply carts. The sky was empty, except for an occasional crow that flew silently from tree to tree.

After they had passed the ruins of a small hamlet, the road turned north and began to rise almost at once. Mountains towered ahead. The men shortened stride. Now they had to put their feet down almost flat against the rough granite surface. Soon the whole column was engulfed by the rolling hills. Only small sections of its dark length were visible at a time, as it twisted back and forth round the sudden curves. The rhythmic crash of feet and the rumble of wheels were joined by the roar of torrents.

Up here there were great numbers of peasants. Their tiny cabins were scattered among the granite boulders that dotted the wild slopes. Patches of rye and potatoes, now ripening, made a quilt of green and gold against the grey background of the savage earth. Women and children stood in silent groups watching the column from a distance. They were half-naked. Hunger and fear made their faces look nearly as savage as the earth. Stunted animals also watched in silence. There were no men or boys in sight.

Fenton remained indifferent to his surroundings, or to the purpose of his journey, until the column had advanced nearly half a mile through the hills. Still smiling happily, he rolled from side to side unevenly with the walking movement of his horse, letting the reins dangle. Then an acrid smell roused him from his reverie. He sniffed several times, made a grimace of disgust and looked sharply to his left. There he saw a cabin built against a massive rock, only a few feet away and almost directly overhead. Unlike the other dwellings in the neighbourhood, it was skilfully thatched with woven rye straw. Its walls were newly white-washed. A little yard, scarcely more than a ledge, was paved with flagstones and scrupulously swept. Both the door and the frame

of the solitary window were painted green. Through the open doorway, he could see the cheerful gleam of polished delft ware on the dressers. An old woman sat facing him on a three-legged stool by the western gable. She looked neat like her house. She was wearing a red frieze skirt and black bodice. Her white hair was carefully plaited and tied in a bun at the nape of her neck. Her face was pale, with high cheekbones, dark blue eyes, thin lips and a beautifully shaped nose. Indeed, all her features were delicately shaped, like a person of good breeding. There was a fire of dried cow dung before her. A large black pot, in which indigo was boiling, hung over the fire by a chain that was attached to an iron bar set in the gable. She had just raised a piece of flannel from the brew on the end of a stick when she saw him look at her. She paused with the stick raised and returned his glance. Both the end of the stick and the piece of flannel were dyed a deep purple. She continued to look at him fixedly. Unlike the other women, who stared at the column from a distance, there was neither fear nor hatred in her eyes. At first they showed surprise. Then they became tender and compassionate. Deeply moved, he turned to his front. Just before his horse rounded a corner, however, he looked at her again. She was still looking at him with tenderness and compassion, as she held the piece of smoking flannel raised above the pot on the end of her stick. Then he lost sight of her. He shuddered and it seemed to him that a veil had been torn from his soul. His new happiness, which had until now merely intoxicated his senses, invaded his soul and drove out hatred. Shame was also driven out and remorse. But above all, he realised that he was now friends with these humble people, whom he had hated for many years simply because he had injured and oppressed them. Throughout his being, he felt a bubbling enthusiasm that he had not known since boyhood. His face shone.

Some few hundred yards farther ahead, unseen men launched a number of massive boulders against the centre of the column from the summit of a precipitous slope, that was fan-shaped and hollow towards its base. So that the rocks converged as they rolled and struck together. Some shot into air. Others broke into fragments. The rest formed into a tumbling mass that finally came to rest in a dip of the road. They made a heap ten feet long and six feet high. The column was cut in two.

Fenton galloped back to the obstacle, dismounted and gave his reins to a constable. After climbing to the summit of the rocks he saw his Head Constable hurrying up the far side.

"Anybody hurt, Reilly?" he said anxiously.

Reilly called out after reaching the summit, enquiring if there had been any casualties. Sergeants answered from either side of the heap, saying that all had escaped injury.

"They broke ranks in time, thank God," Reilly said, mopping his forehead.

"Send the auxiliaries from the rear," Fenton said. "Put them to work at once, removing these stones."

Reilly sent a sergeant to the rear for the auxiliaries.

"They chose their spot well," Fenton said, pointing up the slope with his riding crop. "Must have somebody intelligent in command of them."

The rocks had left clearly defined tracks, running crookedly from the summit in a wide arc to the narrow hollow at the base, like the ribs of an outstretched fan.

"It's smart work all right," Reilly said, staring up the slope. "It will take us an hour to clear the road. O'Dwyer is a smart lad."

"You think it's O'Dwyer?" Fenton said.

"Who else could it be, sir?" Reilly answered.

"Dare say you are right," Fenton said as he climbed down from the heap.

The Head Constable stared in amazement after his superior. He could not understand how a man, who had been on the verge of panic and cowardice in the tent, could have so suddenly regained control of himself.

Butcher came running from the rear with his hat in hand. There were beads of perspiration glittering on his bald crown, between the strands of fawn-coloured hair that were drawn across the sallow skin. He halted on widespread legs before the boulders and glared at them.

"The swine!" he said. "I see their game."

"Quite a clever game," Fenton said with a patronising smile. "Don't you think so?"

The two men looked at one another in silence, Fenton smiling and at ease, Butcher in a blind rage.

"It's the last blow that counts," Neville said at length.

The Resident Magistrate, in whose carriage Neville was riding, now arrived from the rear. He looked frightened. He was a tubby little man with small grey eyes that kept blinking the whole time. His lips were curved in a Cupid's bow, giving the impression that he was on the point of kissing somebody.

"Never seen anything like this in twenty-five years as Resident Magistrate," he said in an awed tone. "Can't understand it. The peasants used to be so humble and docile."

"Peasants, did you say?" Neville barked at him. "Peasants have nothing to do with this. It's a personal attack on me."

"Even so," said the Resident Magistrate, "it's very disconcerting. I never before saw any sign of organised opposition to the process of law. Everybody was so docile."

It took the auxiliaries more than an hour to clear the road. Then the column resumed its march, only to be halted a short distance ahead by a trench dug across the roadway. The auxiliaries filled the trench in twenty minutes. A second trench, much wider and deeper than the first, was encountered after a further short advance, round a sharp turn.

Butcher again came running from the rear while the auxiliaries were beginning to fill this second trench. He had a revolver in one hand and a gold watch in the other. He brandished the revolver at Fenton, who was sitting his horse by the edge of the pit.

"Do you know it's already four o'clock?" he shouted.

"What of it?" Fenton said calmly.

"You are making no effort to do your duty," Neville shouted. "You sit there on your horse like God Almighty, with an insane smile on your face, just as if you were delighted that I'm being turned into ridicule."

"What do you want me to do?" Fenton said.

Several shots rang out at that moment. The bullets went whistling over their heads. The auxiliaries jumped headlong into the trench. Fenton's horse reared up on his hind legs. Neville ran to the side of the road, shouting like a madman. He began to discharge his revolver in the direction of some crags, from on top of which the unseen opponents had fired. A few of the constables also lost their heads and began to discharge their carbines. The tumult excited the others. Soon the whole column was gripped by panic. There was a sustained rattle of gunfire.

"You swine!" Neville roared as he refilled the chambers of his revolver. "Why don't you come out and fight like men?"

After getting his mount under control, Fenton rode down the line, ordering the men to cease fire. The four deputy inspectors and Head Constable Reilly helped him. It was ten minutes before they could quell the disorder.

"You mustn't lose your nerve in this way," Fenton said to the men as he walked his horse along the ranks after firing had ceased. "These people are not shooting at you. They are just trying to frighten you by firing over your heads. You merely play into their hands by returning their fire and by allowing yourselves to get rattled. Carry on, like good fellows. You are in no danger."

A dozen constables, with bayonets fixed to their carbines, had

to be sent down into the trench before the auxiliaries would consent to abandon their hiding-place. After being prodded a little by the cold steel, they jumped out and resumed work. They stood fast a little later, when more shots passed overhead, being constrained by the bayonets that were still pointed at them.

Further obstacles delayed the progress of the column all the way to the summit of the mountain road. It was almost sunset when they finally debouched on to a stretch of flat bogland that sloped gently to a deep ravine. A stone bridge spanned the ravine. High Valley, whose inhabitants were to be evicted, lay beyond. There was a fork in the road at the edge of the bog, one branch going north-west and the other going straight north to the bridge. They marched towards the bridge.

Fenton's blood rushed to his head as he rode across the bog that swayed, as if on springs, beneath the weight of the marching feet. The air was heavy with the fragrant scent of heather. It made him crave urgently for her promised coming.

"Oh! My love!" he whispered. "My darling love! Let it be soon."

High Valley looked radiant in the evening light. It was a shallow bowl scooped out from between the mountain peaks. Here all the land was fertile. Flocks of white sheep fed on the rich grass of the upper slopes. The tilled fields had ripened in the hollow. Three hamlets of white-walled houses were spaced evenly along a winding narrow road that ran from the bridge to the lofty crags at the northern end. Thin columns of blue smoke rose from the chimneys. There was a small lake, half covered with golden reeds, at the foot of the crags in the north. A church stood on a green eminence by the lake. The sun glistened on its slate roof. There was a bell tower at its gable top. The drowsy silence was broken only by the rasping chatter of corn-crakes among the fields of rye.

"I have been given the key of Heaven," Fenton murmured as he drew near to the bridge, "just at the moment when I thought that all was lost."

Suddenly there was a blinding flash, followed by an explosion. One end of the bridge rose up into the air for a short distance at great speed. Then it broke into fragments, which continued upwards at a slower pace. The other end plunged down into the ravine. The sound echoed and re-echoed through the mountains.

A thick cloud of dust came up to meet the risen fragments as they fell to earth.

CHAPTER XXIV

HARDLY DARING TO BREATHE, lest she might disturb his sleep, Lettice raised her head and looked down into Michael's face. The ghostly light of the moon made his features cruel and relentless. Yet she felt overcome by a melting tenderness as she watched. This face of the man she loved had become the most beautiful thing in all the world for her.

She removed her arm with great care from behind his neck, sat up and put her palms against the ground beside him. Then she leaned forward until her face was close to his lips. She turned her head hither and thither, in order to feel the caress of his breath upon it everywhere. She shuddered in rapture as it touched her cheeks, her eyes, her temples and her throat. It seemed to her that his soul flowed out to embrace her at each breath.

The stillness of the night was suddenly broken by a wild cry of terror. It came from a corner of the lake, directly below the grassy slope on which they lay. Michael awoke, sat up and asked her what had happened.

"It was some poor creature in pain down there," she said, pointing towards the lake.

A horde of water hens had broken from the reeds on hearing the cry. They were now in headlong flight across the water, upon which both their wings and their trailing feet kept beating as they sped.

"It must have been a rat that caught one of them," Michael said. "Was I long asleep?"

"Quite a long time," Lettice said. "It's nearly dawn now."

"My God!" he said. "I'm terribly ashamed of myself."

"It was lovely watching you sleep," Lettice whispered.

"I fall asleep in the strangest places," he said. "I once fell asleep floating on the sea. It was shortly after I came back from America. I went for a swim at three o'clock in the morning. I suddenly felt drowsy, turned over on my back and went to sleep. It was broad daylight when I awoke. I had drifted out beyond the mouth of the harbour."

"You do beautiful things," she said.

He put his arms around her and they stretched out on the grass side by side. As their lips joined, the water that had been displaced by the flight of the wild birds lapped feverishly against

the lake shore in tiny dancing waves. They drew apart, sighed and then lay cheek to cheek.

"You are like your father," he said. "Nothing ever frightens you."

"To-day I was frightened," she said.

"Really?" he said.

"The people were very hostile to us," she said, "when we arrived in High Valley this morning. The four girls that came with me from Manister were in tears, because of the nasty things the Valley women shouted at them. The men were equally spiteful. They jeered at the idea of the Fenians being able to help them. In fact, they did their utmost to prevent Flatley and his comrades setting the charge of explosives under the bridge. At first they kept throwing volleys of stones. They stopped when Flatley fired his pistol into the air in warning. Then they shouted abuse and said that the bridge had been there for many generations, that a curse would fall on those who destroyed it and that its loss would cause famine in the Valley. I stood on a rock and tried to reason with them, saying that their supplies could come from Clash equally well by pannier over the northern pass. I pointed out to them that they would surely be evicted unless the police were halted. To do that, it was necessary to destroy the bridge. The continued existence of the bridge, I said, could not possibly benefit them if they were evicted from their houses and lands. On the contrary, it would then benefit only Captain Butcher, their enemy. My arguments made no impression on them. Indeed, they became still more hostile to me, shouting that they were rich people while they had a bridge over which carts with metalled wheels could travel, that it was a mortal sin to destroy a stone arch of such beauty, that all useful things were inspired by God and therefore sacred. Poor creatures! They loved their bridge, because it was the chief ornament of their humble lives. Later a young man on a white horse came with news that the Fenians were delaying the police. They listened attentively to his account of what was happening out there beyond the bog. For the first time they began to be impressed by the practical importance of the Fenian effort. After the young man had finished, they stood in a compact group on a grassy knoll and whispered to one another in awed tones, like a flock of startled birds. Then the sound of gunfire came from beyond the bog. That was when I got frightened."

Michael pressed her closer to him and said:

"Didn't you know that your father made me promise not to hurt anybody?"

"It was the hostility of the people that frightened me," she said.

"I can't imagine how the people could frighten you," he said, "when you love them so much."

"It was then that I decided to become a Catholic," she whispered.

Michael sat up and looked at her in astonishment.

"What made you decide to do that?" he said.

"It would be difficult for me to explain," Lettice said as she also sat up and moved away from him a little. "Indeed, it would be quite impossible for me to tell you how I reached that decision. I only know that I no longer felt frightened after I had reached it. I felt liberated. I knew that the last barrier between the people and myself had been removed."

"I understand," Michael said.

"The people also understood," Lettice cried excitedly. "They understood at once. Oh! It was glorious. The police came marching towards us across the bog. There were a few minutes of silence and extreme tension. Then the bridge rose into the air. The police halted. The people huddled closer together on the knoll, appalled at first by the noise of the explosion and the destruction of their beautiful arch. They gradually gained courage on seeing the confusion and anger of their enemies. So they crept silently towards the edge of the ravine. Then the police turned and marched back across the bog. The people at once found voice. Some of them embraced, shouted, sang, danced and threw things into the air. Others knelt reverently and thanked God. I again stood on the rock and told them that the fight was not yet won, that the police would encircle the Valley and try to enter by the northern pass, that barricades must be built at once up there, that the women must form companies and learn how to defend the barricades on the morrow. They gathered round me and shouted that they would fight to-morrow to the last drop of their blood. Then they insisted on doing me personal honour. They brought a straw arm-chair from the village and made me sit on it. Four young men placed poles under it and hoisted it to their shoulders. I was carried aloft that way to this northern village by the lake, with the people all marching in procession behind me, except for some children that ran in front, scattering flowers on the road and singing. It was very beautiful."

Michael got to his feet after she had finished speaking. He folded his arms on his chest and looked towards the north.

"You don't seem to be pleased with my story, Michael," she said after a long pause.

As he remained silent, she also got to her feet and stood close

beside him, looking towards the north. There were watch-fires burning up there, among the lofty crags on the horizon. Men walked to and fro, from fire to fire. They were Fenians on guard against a night advance by the police.

"Don't you want me to become a Catholic?" she said.

He turned towards her abruptly and said:

"I wasn't thinking of that."

"Of what were you thinking?" she whispered.

He walked over to a rock and leaned against it. She came and put her arm about his shoulders.

"When you spoke of feeling liberated," he said after another long silence, "I remembered the night I joined the Fenians, when I was sixteen. It must have been the very same emotion that you experienced to-day."

"Tell me about it," Lettice said.

"I think I told you that my mother took me to Dublin," he said, "after my father was hanged and that she died shortly afterwards and that my Uncle John adopted me."

"You did," Lettice said.

"I was only a year old at that time," he continued. "Uncle John hated having to take care of me. He was becoming famous as a surgeon in Dublin and he was afraid that his connection with the son of a hanged rebel might injure his career at a crucial moment. So he kept me practically a prisoner in his house during my early childhood. Nobody ever came to visit us. He was a bachelor. He had all his meals at his club except breakfast. I saw him only on Sunday mornings. The servant, an old woman called Kate, left me with him in the dining-room while she was getting dressed to escort me to nine o'clock Mass. My uncle would stare at me in silence from time to time until he had finished eating. Then he would fold his napkin carefully, put his elbows on the table, hold up his hands close to his eyes and lecture me. He kept turning his hands back and forth, examining them minutely, while he spoke. He always said the same things, in a bored and hostile tone, about the evil of rebellion against constituted authority. From the very first, even while I was still little more than an infant, I knew by instinct to whom he was referring, although he avoided any mention of my father. I also knew that he hated me and that he looked upon me as a monster, whom he was condemned to shelter under his roof by circumstances beyond his control. I hated him in return, with the relentless passion of a child that is starving for want of affection. He was a handsome man, tall, of dignified carriage, with piercing blue eyes and prematurely grey hair that rose up straight from his forehead in a

little wall. He had amazing hands, delicate like those of a woman and so long-fingered that they almost looked distorted. He was always toying with them, examining them close to his eyes, stroking them, washing them, rubbing oil into them and paring the nails. They were his chief stock in trade. They were said to be 'inspired hands.' Even then, they enabled him to demand enormous fees for performing operations. Such was the disgust he inspired in me that I even now feel offended, whenever I see a man look at his hands in the way Uncle John used to do. I tell you this so that you may understand how my mind had turned in upon itself, through loneliness and a sense of injury. At twelve I went to a boarding school, where I received further lectures about the evils of rebellion against constituted authority. Morning and evening, day after day, they tried to turn me into an obedient slave of the English. Relieved of the embarrassment caused by my presence, my uncle bought a large house in the most fashionable part of town, engaged a staff of servants and began to entertain on a grand scale. During the holidays, he made me keep out of the way. In spite of that, I sometimes overheard conversations when there were guests in the drawing-room. Nearly always, as if Fate would have it so, I overheard vulgar jokes about Irish people. The majority of the guests were always English, officials and high officers of the garrison. My uncle was cultivating them as part of his campaign to secure a title. I noticed that his English guests had no respect for him. They would practically order him, just as if he were a lackey of theirs instead of being their host, to tell one of his shameful stories about the customs and oddities of speech and religious beliefs prevalent among our peasants. I was shocked to see that Uncle John, whom I had hitherto known as a solemn and dignified man, was a garrulous buffoon in the presence of these English people. Once I even saw him go down on his knees and crawl across the carpet barking like a dog, in order to make them laugh. After that, my hatred for him turned into contempt. I realised that the wretched man was but a single result of the oppression that was degrading the whole mass of our nation. A far more terrible hatred began to gather within my heart. I used to wander from our part of the city into the slums along the quays on the north side. It gave me a morose satisfaction to be among the dregs of the population, as if their rags and their bestial houses and their obscene language were a justification of my terrible anger. One Sunday morning, shortly after I had turned sixteen, I heard a ballad-singer recite a lament for my father, near a crowd of men that were playing pitch-and-toss on an open space

by the Customs House. I bought one of the ballads and read it at once. It gave a detailed account of the events that led to my father's death. I asked the man if he knew the author of the ballad. At first he refused to tell me. Then I said that it was written about my father and gave him proof of my identity. He became friendly at once and told me that the author was Father Francis Kelly. I made up my mind on the spot. Three days later, I set out across Ireland on foot with the ballad-singer, carrying a small bundle over my shoulder at the end of a stick. I had left a note for my uncle, telling him that I was determined to follow the road my father had taken and warning him that it was useless trying to interfere with me. That was the last contact I had with him. Years later, I heard that he had been made Sir John Corcoran by Queen Victoria and that he had gone to live in London. I soon discovered that the ballad-singer was really a Fenian organiser, trying to rally the fighting spirit of the people after the failure of the '67 rising. We talked to groups of Fenians here and there. Some of them were still living out on the hills as outlaws. They all accepted me with enthusiasm on account of my father. I took the Fenian oath one night before a camp fire on a hill near Ballinasloe."

He turned towards her and gripped her arm. She could feel his hand trembling.

"That was when I got the feeling of being liberated," he added. "When I saw the glorious light of the soldier's faith in the eyes of those men that surrounded me as I took the oath, I felt that I had been raised up from among the damned."

Lettice threw herself against his bosom and cried in rapture:

"Oh! Michael, we now belong completely to one another and to the people. After I have been received into the Church, we can be married by Father Costigan. There won't be anything to mar our happiness."

"I have no right to marry you," Michael said.

"Why do you say that?" she said.

"Because I know that I'm very near the end of my road," he said solemnly.

"Please don't torture me, Michael," she said.

"I'm in dead earnest," he said. "I'm certain that it's going to be very soon."

"How could you possibly know that?" she cried indignantly. "It's not right to say such things."

"I'm as certain of it," he said, "as that I'm standing here beside you."

"Oh! Michael!" she cried, with a sob in her throat.

She threw herself against his chest and shuddered. After a little while she looked up into his face and smiled sadly.

"It's too late to allow a foreboding of evil to interfere with our life together," she said. "We love one another. Our lives have become one. Neither of us can escape from the other's sorrow. We must share everything together."

"There is one thing that cannot be shared," Michael said.

"I'm not afraid of death," she said. "I'm only afraid of not belonging to you."

"You are brave the way a man is brave," he said.

"Then you will marry me, Michael," she said.

"You are so brave and so gentle," he said.

"Beloved!" she said.

The dawn breeze now whistled softly among the reeds. The sky had lightened in the east. The church bell tolled, calling on the people to awake and defend High Valley.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TIDE WAS FULL. The sound of the waves, beating gently against the pebbled shore, was barely audible on the terrace. It was like a deep sigh, repeated at short intervals.

Raoul closed the book he had been reading, stretched out his legs and yawned.

"I can't read," he said. "I can't think. Here I am, yawning at eleven o'clock in the morning, like a village idiot who only wants to sleep in the sun. Six months ago, I'd have been mortally insulted if told this could happen to me."

He stretched his arms above his head and yawned once more. Then he closed his eyes, dropped his chin on his chest and laced his fingers across his stomach.

"I detest the sound of the sea," he said. "It's like the ticking of a clock, reminding me that I'm getting old, that I'll soon lose consciousness and dissolve into unrelated particles of matter."

"I can't understand how you can be so heartless," Elizabeth said in a complaining tone as she dropped her knitting on to her lap. "Lettice has been gone two days now. We've had no news of her beyond rumours of wild happenings in High Valley. Yet you are able to yawn and talk drivel."

"You are being ridiculous," Raoul said with his eyes closed. "I didn't sleep a wink last night. That's why I'm yawning."

"Then why don't you admit that you are worried, instead of pretending that you are a heartless monster?" Elizabeth said.

"It's a peculiar form of vanity," Raoul said.

He opened his eyes, sat up and looked at his sister with interest.

"I've been waiting for you to scold me," he said, "for having allowed Lettice to go there. Yet you haven't said a word. What does it mean?"

Elizabeth picked up her knitting once more and shrugged her shoulders.

"Can it be that your ideas have changed?" Raoul continued. "Upon my word! I do believe that you approve of her leading the peasant women against the police."

"Who am I to approve or disapprove of God's will?" Elizabeth said.

"Rubbish," said Raoul. "It was my will that sent her."

"It's God's will," Elizabeth said gently.

"I planned the whole thing down to the most minute detail," Raoul said, "and I don't believe in God. So it could not possibly have been God's will."

"It was God's will," Elizabeth said. "He often uses unbelievers to serve His divine purpose."

"Ugh! Reason is futile against such rubbish," Raoul said.

At that moment they heard a commotion within the house. A door was thrown open with violence. They both jumped to their feet excitedly.

"That must be Lettice," Elizabeth said.

They hurried into the living-room. As they entered by the window, Annie Fitzpatrick came through the door leading from the hall. She was dragging Tim Ahearn rudely by the arm.

"If I could lay hands on the ruffians that did it," she cried as she led him across the floor, "all they'd ever need in this world would be Extreme Unction."

She halted at a short distance from Raoul and Elizabeth, shook Ahearn and added:

"Speak up now, Tim. Tell them who did it."

Ahearn looked at Raoul in a shamefaced manner on being released by Annie. His right cheek and his left ear were heavily bandaged. There were many lumps and bruises on other parts of his face.

"She is making big out of little," he said. "The doctor told me they were of no account at all. They're only scratches."

"Begging your honour's pardon," Annie said, "sure, it's not the wounds I meant at all. It's the insult that's big, not the wounds."

Ahearn stepped nimbly aside as Elizabeth approached to examine him.

"It's nothing at all, miss," he said. "Annie is making big out of little."

"It's the insult that's big," Annie shouted. "I'm not talking of the wounds."

"Silence, woman," Raoul said. "Let's hear about it, Tim."

Ahearn squared his fists like a boxer and said:

"A whole crowd of them set on me after I came out of the shop."

"Begin at the beginning, for mercy's sake," Raoul said.

"It was McNamara's shop," Annie intervened. "I sent him down for a sack of flour."

"That's right," Ahearn said. "It was Julia McNamara started it, while I was getting the flour at the counter. She began casting on your honour about the death of Michael Bodkin and the kidnapping of the men that were summoned to court and the eviction of Father Kelly from the tavern."

"What's that?" cried Raoul, becoming very agitated. "Who made these remarks?"

"The shopkeeper's daughter, your honour," Annie said. "She has a slate off, as they say."

"She kept casting and casting," Ahearn continued, raising his voice, "until I finally lost my temper with her and I carrying the flour out to the cart. I gave her a short answer then. One word led to another. A crowd gathered. Somebody threw a small stone. That fairly riled me. I threw my hat on the ground, spat on my fists and challenged them all. They gathered round me, led by old Pat Rice, and they shouted that your honour was Anti-christ himself, sent all the way from Paris by the Devil. They said you read a 'Black Mass in Bodkin's tavern before the unfortunate man hanged himself, that you drove away Father Kelly for fear God's grace might save Bodkin's soul at the last minute and that you are planning to burn the parish church."

He turned to Elizabeth, bent his massive thighs in crude obeisance and added in a lower tone:

"Saving your presence, Miss Elizabeth, they said the girls that went to High Valley with Miss Lettice are now whoring with the Fenians."

"Oh! The outrageous creatures!" cried Elizabeth.

"That last cast was more than I could stand," cried Ahearn, turning back towards Raoul. "I let fly at a young fellow that stood near me. He's a scrawny gaum of a lad named Tony Regan, the tailor's eldest son. He went head over heels into the drain

beside the cooper's house. Then skin and hair began to fly. They pelted me with everything they could throw. Soon they got me down and began to kick me. Only for the police came, there wouldn't be enough left on my bones to feed a wren. Dr. McCarthy tidied up the cuts at the dispensary. The police wanted me to prefer charges, but I refused, knowing you wouldn't want me to have anything to do with the law."

"Poor Tim!" Elizabeth said. "It's horrible to think there are such miscreants in the village."

"This is bad news," Raoul said dejectedly. "Very bad news, indeed."

Ahearn took a pace forward and cried arrogantly:

"The people are turning against your honour, just as I said they would."

"Don't listen to that fool," Annie Fitzpatrick cried angrily. "Your honour, he doesn't know what he is saying."

"I know well what I'm saying," Ahearn said. "There are rumours that martial law is going to be declared. So the people are turning tail at the first sign of trouble."

"You're a liar," Annie Fitzpatrick said.

"I'm not, then," cried Ahearn. "I tell you there was a big crowd there to-day and they were all hostile. The people are fair-weather friends, Mr. Raoul. I knew they would turn against you."

"Stop casting on the people, you drunken liar," Annie Fitzpatrick said as she began to thump Ahearn on the chest. "The people are loyal, I say."

"I tell you they are cowards," Ahearn shouted. "There was a big crowd there attacking me."

"Silence, both of you," Raoul said. "God's belly! Am I never going to succeed in teaching you two the meaning of the word 'dignity'?"

The two servants made a respectful bow to their master. Yet they continued to argue in restrained tones.

"I couldn't let him accuse the people of being disloyal," Annie said.

"You know me, sir," Ahearn insisted. "I wouldn't say there was a big crowd, unless there was a big crowd."

"There was no crowd there," Annie said; "only a handful of fools."

"That's enough now," Elizabeth said. "You'll annoy your master. Take Tim to the dining-room, Annie, and give him some brandy."

"God spare your health, Miss Elizabeth," Ahearn said with enthusiasm.

"Not too much brandy, Annie," Raoul said. "I'm anything but pleased with his conduct."

Ahearn was halfway to the door when he heard this last remark. He rushed back towards Raoul with outstretched hands.

"Wasn't I ready to offer up the last drop of my blood for your honour?" he cried in an outraged tone.

"I don't require your blood," Raoul said. "You shouldn't have provoked these stupid people. You have probably started something that might very well prove disastrous for my plans."

"Raoul, how can you abuse a servant that has shown his loyalty in such a remarkable way?" said Elizabeth indignantly.

"Be off," Raoul said to Ahearn. "Drink your brandy before I get really annoyed with you. Drink all you please. You are an incorrigible idiot. I don't see any further use in trying to improve you."

Annie Fitzpatrick seized Ahearn and pushed him towards the door in triumph.

"That'll teach you," she cried vindictively, "never again to say there was a crowd when there was no crowd."

She opened the door and then drew back with a cry of surprise.

"Glory be to God!" she said. "It's Miss Lettice herself."

Lettice rushed into the room and cried out in triumph:

"We won."

She halted a little way from the door and seemed undecided whether to go towards her father or her aunt. She looked quite as slender as a child in her grey riding habit. She was carrying her little hat in her hand. Her red hair was shining, as if the dew of the mountains still clung to it. She finally decided on going to her father first. She kissed him hurriedly and then rushed to Elizabeth.

"Dearest aunt," she whispered, as she threw herself into Elizabeth's outstretched arms.

They began to sob as they embraced. Then they went towards the terrace, each with an arm around the other's waist.

"Upon my word!" Raoul muttered. "I am surrounded by hysteria of all sorts."

Michael came into the room as the two servants were again making their way out into the hall. He looked distraught and ill at ease.

"More power to you!" Annie Fitzpatrick said to him reverently, as she went out.

"Lord have mercy on the dead!" Tim Ahearn said, making a little curtsy.

"Well?" Raoul said as Michael crossed the floor. "How did things turn out?"

"Everything went exactly as you planned," Michael said.

"Sit down and tell me about it," Raoul said as he began to pace the floor.

Michael sat on the sofa and said:

"We held them along the southern approach to the valley until sunset of the day before yesterday. When they reached the bridge, we blew it up in their faces. They turned back, circled the valley and halted at Carragh for the night. The auxiliaries fled from that village, when we began sniping after midnight. We learned also that a fight broke out at the hotel between Butcher and Head Constable Reilly. They fell downstairs from the second floor; locked in one another's arms. Reilly broke his leg and Butcher got badly cut about the face. They were taken to the hospital at Clash. In the morning, the remainder of the column came up the pass. There again we managed to delay them until three o'clock in the afternoon. Most of them were exhausted by the time they reached the summit. I drew off my men at that point, according to your plan, giving Lettice charge of the defence. The police charged the barricades with fixed bayonets. The women met them with volleys of stones, breaking up the first charge before it could come to close quarters. District Inspector Fenton got thrown from his horse. One of the deputy inspectors took command and rallied the police. They came again with their bayonets levelled. Their blood was up, so the volleys of stones did not stop them. Neither did the women flinch. Some gripped the bayonets with their naked hands. Others poured boiling water from buckets on to the heads of the police. The line was pierced at one point and a party of police broke into the rear. A reserve group of big women immediately went into action with cudgels. They were as big and strong as men, barefooted, with their red skirts tied up about their waists and heavy shawls wrapped round their skulls for protection against the carbine butts. They yelled as they charged and used their blackthorn cudgels with great skill. The fight lasted for about ten minutes. Then the police broke. The whole line followed suit. They all ran for their lives down the mountain."

"Anybody seriously hurt?" Raoul said.

"One woman got a deep bayonet wound in her thigh," Michael said, "but the doctor said it's not really serious. Apart from that, there were only torn palms, bruises and a few bones broken. A number of the police were burned and a large number of them got their skulls cracked, but nobody was fatally injured.

Fenton was only stunned. He was able to ride back to Clash."

"Good," said Raoul. "By killing one of them, we would merely give the Government an excuse for taking strong measures. Our object is to teach our people how to fight. We must do nothing that would endanger the first feeble stirring of that fighting spirit. We can't expose it to the stern test of real battle at birth. You did well."

"It's Lettice who is to be congratulated," Michael said. "It was her handling of the women that . . ."

"It's good news that Butcher is obviously beginning to lose his nerve," Raoul interrupted. "We can now proceed with the final assault on him. The stage is set. However, it would be well for us not to get excited over this minor success at High Valley. Butcher can procure another writ at the next Assizes, three months from now. Judging from the news I have just received, there may be no resistance to his next attempt at evicting the High Valley people."

Michael got to his feet and said anxiously:

"Is there something wrong?"

Raoul described the attack on Ahearn and the slanders uttered against himself.

"Pay no attention to those people," Michael said. "They are just a few religious fanatics. They have no influence."

"You are wrong," said Raoul. "I have been expecting something like this. The Church is being set against us."

"It was against us from the beginning," Michael said. "What of it?"

"This is different," said Raoul. "Until now, the Church opposed us officially, on moral grounds. Now it is using the weapon of superstitious fear, in an underhand manner. Superstition is the oldest and most effective weapon in the hands of tyranny."

"I'll soon deal with that group," Michael said. "I'll guarantee they won't attack anybody else for a long time."

"What do you propose to do?" said Raoul.

"Leave that to me, sir," Michael said.

"I forbid you to use force," said Raoul.

"Why not?" said Michael. "You have told me, again and again, that prevention is always the best cure in war."

"Force would only make matters worse in this instance," said Raoul. "Superstition is a deadly germ that must be handled with extreme delicacy. In any case, they have me at a disadvantage. I blundered badly in the case of Father Francis."

"I know this group of people," Michael said indignantly.

"They are just acting out of spite. It's not religion that inspires them at all. I'm certain that Father Costigan disapproves of them."

Raoul shook his head.

"In a free society," he said, "religion is the poetry of the people. It is the dark-ecstasy by means of which even the most lowly confront suffering and death with dignity. It ennobles all the incidents of daily life. Under tyranny, on the other hand, it becomes the monopoly of priestcraft, being tolerated by the ruling power only for the purpose of keeping the oppressed in ignorant awe. In the latter case, religion becomes an evil and mysterious force, to be approached by free men with the utmost caution."

Elizabeth and Lettice came into the room at that moment, arm in arm. They both looked very excited.

"Raoul," said Elizabeth, "these young people have something very important to say."

"What is it now?" said Raoul.

Lettice broke away from Elizabeth and ran over to Michael. She took his hand. He looked at Raoul and blushed deeply.

"What is it all about?" said Raoul, becoming irritated.

"My brother is not really an ogre," Elizabeth said to Michael. "Don't be afraid of him."

"Lettice and I love one another," Michael said at length to Raoul. "We ask your consent to our marriage."

Raoul put the tips of his fingers to his beard and sighed with relief.

"Upon my word!" he said. "I thought something dreadful had happened. So you two people love one another and wish to be married. Excellent."

He bowed to them and added:

"I congratulate you both on being in love."

Lettice rushed to Raoul, threw her arms about his neck and said:

"Then we have your consent, father?"

"Of course," said Raoul after he had kissed her affectionately. "With my whole heart. You have chosen a man who is brave and noble of spirit. What more could I ask of you?"

Michael then came and shook hands with Raoul, as Elizabeth again put her arm around Lettice's waist.

"There is even greater news," Elizabeth said to her brother. "Lettice has decided to become a Catholic."

Raoul started. Then he remained silent for a little while, staring at Lettice in wonder.

"Very interesting," he said at length. "Very interesting indeed."

He suddenly turned to Elizabeth and cried excitedly:

"You know all about these things, Lizzie. Is it true that converts have to receive certain instruction prior to being accepted into the Catholic Church?"

"Of course," said Elizabeth.

"Excellent," said Raoul, staring at the ground and beginning to look really relieved for the first time since he had heard of the attack on Ahearn. "I think this is most extraordinary."

"What do you mean by that?" said Elizabeth suspiciously.

"It means," said Raoul, "that I have been given a most unexpected card to play. It could only be Destiny that has given me this card."

CHAPTER XXVI

RAOUL HAD TO LEAVE HIS CARRIAGE on the road and walk the remaining two miles to Father Kelly's stone hut, across very difficult country. There was a rough lane for half a mile. It was bound by stone fences and so narrow that he had to walk sideways, in order to avoid having his clothes torn by the briars that grew in profusion along the sides. Then he came to a holy well, over which a mass of tattered rags had been hung by devout people. The lane ended there. He crossed a stile on to a wild slope that rose very steeply to the summit of Manister Head. There was only a faint track winding upwards through granite boulders and clumps of gorse. He fell several times, owing to the short grass being slippery after a long period of dry weather. Such was his eagerness to see Father Francis that he never once paused to take breath before reaching the top of the mountain.

The hut was in the centre of a flat space, that reached out from the edge of the cliffs for about two hundred yards. The sea lay more than six hundred feet below. A flock of sea birds had been dozing on the cliff top when Raoul appeared. They rose into the air, making a great cackle. Disturbed by the sound, Father Francis came to the door of his hut and looked around him. He started on catching sight of Raoul. Then he rushed back into the hut again without saying a word.

Raoul advanced at a leisurely pace across the open space. He was dressed in a belted tweed jacket, cord knee breeches, worsted stockings, half boots and a peaked cap. This was more or less

the costume worn by country gentlemen when out shooting. Yet it made him look even more outlandish than did his buckled shoes and his black cloak. The truth is, of course, that individuals of arresting personality look most "different" when they try to look commonplace.

The cone-shaped hut was twelve feet high and thirty feet in circumference at the base. The wall was remarkably well preserved, considering that it was more than two thousand years old and made with uncut stones that did not fit very well. There was neither window nor chimney. The door was five feet high and narrowed slightly towards the top. A fairly large man could pass without touching its sides.

"Come no farther," the priest said from within the hut when Raoul approached, "until you tell me what brought you here."

Raoul halted and said:

"I came to ask a favour."

"In that case," said Father Francis, "you may go at once. I won't grant your favour."

"You must at least allow me to tell you what it is," said Raoul.

"They brought me news of Bodkin's death yesterday," said the priest.

"The favour I came to ask," said Raoul, "concerns others. I ask nothing for myself."

"My first impression was right," said the priest. "You are an evil man."

"We are all evil," said Raoul, "judged by the standard of perfection."

"You have a glib tongue," said the priest. "That's why you are so dangerous."

"I beg of you to hear me," said Raoul.

"Go away," the priest shouted. "I have my soul to save."

Raoul sighed and folded his arms on his chest. There was silence for a long time.

"Are you gone?" the priest called out from within.

Raoul smiled and then walked on tip-toe to one side. He put his fingers to his beard and waited. The priest came out of the hut after a little while and looked all round. Seeing Raoul, he became very angry.

"So you are still here," he cried. "Didn't I tell you to go?"

He approached Raoul aggressively. He was in his shirt-sleeves and his trousers were tied at the waist by a piece of rough string. He had got very haggard during the past weeks. There was hardly a scrap of flesh on his dark face.

"I insist on speaking to you, face to face," Raoul said firmly.

You must be patient with me. You know very well that I wouldn't insult your privacy in this brutal way without good reason."

"Very well, then," the priest said, coming abruptly to a halt. "Say what you have to say quickly."

"First of all," said Raoul, "allow me to apologise for causing you pain."

"You are shameless," said the priest in disgust. "You drive a poor sinner to his death and then you apologise."

"I'm not apologising for driving him to his death," said Raoul.

"For what then?" said the priest.

"For not explaining to you why I acted as I did," said Raoul.

"You see, I thought you and I understood one another that day we shook hands in my study."

"I didn't understand you that day," said the priest. "I do now. I know now what sort of man you are."

"Indeed!" said Raoul, beginning to get heated. "What sort of a man am I?"

"You'd destroy the whole of humanity for the sake of proving a theory correct," said the priest. "In other words, you are completely inhuman. The only really strong impulse in you is curiosity. Nowadays, it is fashionable to call that kind of curiosity intellectual speculation. Innumerable crimes are committed in its name. To me, though, it is no less contemptible than the curiosity of a village woman, who peeps through a crack in a door at something scandalous. The worst evil of all is inhumanity, to do wicked things in cold blood, to have no sympathy with sinners or with those who suffer."

"You do me an injustice," said Raoul. "I'm not in the habit of defending myself. That I do so now is because it is not I who am accused. You are really denouncing the right of the people to sit in judgment on those who sin against them."

"You are playing with words as usual," said the priest.

"I assume full responsibility for Bodkin's death," said Raoul. "I knew he would kill himself if you were removed from his house. Indeed, I got worried when the days passed and he delayed taking the final and inevitable step."

"That is a monstrous admission," said Father Francis.

"I deny that," said Raoul. "When a nation is conquered it loses the right to administer justice over its territory. The conqueror alone imposes his will by force. Therefore, there is no justice. Why? Justice is the discipline necessary for maintaining the nation's moral and racial health. The conqueror, on the other hand, uses it simply as a means of debasing the moral and physical condition of the enslaved nation."

"What are you driving at?" said the priest irritably. "I asked you to be quick. Stop beating about the bush."

"An enslaved nation is forced to find means other than the traditional ones," said Raoul, "for imposing its will on defaulters."

"I see," said the priest. "You are trying to put me in a false position. I don't object to punishment. It is to torture I object."

"All punishment is torture," said Raoul, "unless it is imposed in a moment of passion. Legal punishment is always deliberate and in cold blood."

"Punishment becomes torture," shouted the priest, "only when it gives pleasure to those who impose it."

"So you really believe that the manner of Bodkin's death gave me pleasure," said Raoul.

"I do," said the priest. "What was the favour you came to ask?"

Raoul remained silent for some time, looking at the ground.

"My daughter is getting married," he said at length, "and wishes to become a Catholic. I came to ask your help in preparing her reception into the Church."

"Who is the man?" said the priest suspiciously.

"Michael O'Dwyer," said Raoul. "I hoped you would honour me by staying at Manister Lodge as my guest, while instructing Lettice in Catholic dogma."

"That's not really why you came," said the priest.

The two men now looked one another straight between the eyes. Then Raoul sighed, shrugged his shoulders and began to walk away. Father Francis barred his advance.

"Now that you are here," said the priest angrily, "I insist that you tell me the real reason for your coming."

"Let me pass," said Raoul. "The truth would only make you more unhappy."

"I insist," said the priest.

"Very well," said Raoul. "The people stoned my servant to-day in the village because of Bodkin's suicide and your eviction from your quarters in the tavern. When my daughter and Michael announced . . ."

"You want to use me as a shield," said Father Francis.

"It was a shabby thing to do," said Raoul.

"Say no more," said Father Francis, stepping aside. "Go your way."

Raoul bowed and then walked away briskly. The priest stood motionless for a while, with his back to Raoul. Then he suddenly

uttered a loud cry and turned round. Raoul halted. He also turned.

"Forgive me," cried Father Francis as he came running with outstretched arms. "Forgive my rudeness."

"My dear friend," said Raoul, also stretching out his hands and speaking with deep emotion, "it is I who beg forgiveness."

"No, no," cried Father Francis, as they clasped hands. "It is I who have been unjust and poor in spirit."

He kissed Raoul's hand with reverence. Then the two men put their hands on each other's shoulders and smiled happily.

"This is a great moment," Raoul said.

"I'll gladly come to live at your house," said Father Francis.

"From now on," cried Raoul exultantly, "I'm certain that we're going to understand one another."

"I was jealous of you," Father Francis said. "I got jealous when O'Dwyer began to be influenced by you. I have been sulking in my tent ever since, finding fault with everything you did."

"From now on," said Raoul, "you are going to be a tower of strength to me."

"Come into the house," Father Francis said, "while I put my things together. Then I'll come with you."

He took Raoul by the arm and they walked towards the hut.

"I have a stool for you to sit on," the priest continued, looking towards Raoul as he walked, "and there is a cup of milk that a neighbour woman gave me this morning. Oh! The people are very kind to me. They come from far away with presents for me. I feel ashamed of myself for taking half the things they bring. All I have to give them in return is my blessing. What good is the blessing of a terrible sinner like myself? Oh! Indeed, I'm a terrible sinner for having deserted the people at a time like this. From now on, though, I'm going to do my share, shoulder to shoulder with Michael and yourself. I'll not be mean or whinging any more. Stoop down now and enter, in God's name. It's dark inside, but I have a small piece of candle that I'll light for you."

After the two men had passed into the hut, the gulls settled once more on the brink of the cliff. Soon there was a long white row of them standing there in silence, like soldiers on parade, high above the sea.

CHAPTER XXVII

LATE THAT AFTERNOON, Julia McNamara saw Father Francis go through the village in Raoul's carriage, on the way to Manister Lodge. As if on purpose to annoy her, Raoul drove past her father's house at a snail's pace. Peering down from her bedroom window on the second floor, she saw the two men in earnest conversation. They had their heads close together like bosom friends. She also saw the priest's belongings on the carriage floor. That made it clear to her that he was going to be Raoul's guest at the Lodge.

She threw herself face downwards on her bed and wept bitterly for some time after they had passed. Then she stopped crying and stared at the wall fixedly for more than an hour, with the tips of her fore-fingers between her teeth. Her mind was void of thought most of that time. Now and again, however, she realised poignantly that the reconciliation between Raoul and Father Kelly would surely spoil her plan for turning the people against the St. George family. She drove her teeth sharply into the flesh of her fingers whenever this thought tormented her.

The village carpenter came into the shop next morning, to buy nails and timber, while she was serving behind the counter. He was a red-haired man called O'Rourke. He had a very gloomy disposition, due to being afflicted with a club foot. That morning, however, he looked gay and excited. Julia became curious to know what had roused such a surly fellow.

"Were you left a fortune?" she said.

"No, then," said O'Rourke, "but I heard that a black sheep is returning to God's fold and sure that's great news any morning."

"What black sheep would that be?" Julia said.

"Mr. St. George sent for me this morning," O'Rourke said, "and asked me to mend his summer-house. It's that small wooden building that's been lying in ruins for years, down by the sea at the western end of the Lodge grounds. He said Father Kelly is going to live there, as soon as I get the roof and the floor put in order. When I was leaving, Annie Fitzpatrick invited me into the kitchen for a cup of tea. She told me that Mr. St. George wanted to give Father Kelly the best room at the Lodge, but that the holy man himself preferred to be in the summer house, where he'd have more freedom to do penance at any hour of the day or night that came into his head, without having to take other people into

consideration and with little or nothing in the way of furniture to bother him. But that's only the toe-nail of what she told me."

He leaned across the counter towards Julia and added in a dramatic whisper:

"The black sheep that's returning to God's fold, Annie said, is no less a person than Miss Lettice. She's going to become a Catholic as soon as Father Kelly has finished teaching her the catechism. Then she'll marry Michael O'Dwyer. Glory be to God, isn't that powerful news?"

Julia fell down in a faint. She had to be taken upstairs and put to bed. She remained prostrate for three days, refusing to touch any solid food and unable to get even a wink of sleep. Whenever she closed her eyes through exhaustion, acute remorse of conscience caused her to become wide awake at once. She absolutely refused to see a doctor.

"I'd rather die," she said, "than have a man lay hands on any part of me."

On the morning of the fourth day, her parents were astonished to see her come downstairs for breakfast, humming a gay tune.

"I want to have the wedding as soon as possible," she said to them.

"Lord save us, child," her mother said, "but I don't know whether I'm coming or going, on account of the way you behave. Ever since you agreed to marry Jim Clancy, you have refused to discuss a date for the wedding. Now you want to have it at once."

"Leave her alone, woman," Bartly cried excitedly. "Say nothing for fear she might change her contrary mind."

He ran out of the house without waiting to put on his hat. He consulted Clancy and the parish priest. They both agreed to have the wedding on Tuesday of the following week.

"It's settled now," Bartly said in triumph on his return home. "You'll get married this time, Julia, even if I have to kick you on the knees and back you into the church like an obstinate horse."

"Have no fear," Julia said. "I'm going to carry my cross without complaint."

The village people were intensely annoyed by her behaviour during the six days that preceded the wedding. They all knew of her hopeless love for O'Dwyer. Yet they saw her go abroad with a radiant smile on her face, just as if her most tender dreams were about to come true. She spent long hours each evening on her knees by the altar rails in the parish church, gazing in rapture towards the statue of the Blessed Virgin.

"The conceit of her," they said, "pretending that she's happy, when we know well that Jim Clancy is poison to her."

It was not through vanity that Julia behaved like that. Just as she had feared, when she saw Father Francis go to the Lodge, the people had veered away from her and returned to Raoul. The very same crowd that stoned Ahearn at her instigation was now ready to stone herself. Such extreme fickleness was merely a sign that the popular frenzy had reached its climax. The lovelorn creature understood it to be the work of the Devil. So she was joyously offering her broken heart strings to God as a holocaust, in order to frustrate the Devil's plans.

As she went to the altar on her wedding day, those present in church whispered to one another that they had never seen a happier bride. They certainly had never seen a lovelier one. During the ceremony, she made the responses in a clear and fervent tone, as if every fibre of her being were in complete accord with her promise to love Clancy. It was only when he took her in his arms that she was seen to stiffen and go pale. She quickly recovered. Again she looked radiant as she walked back to the village on her husband's arm, at the head of the procession.

Late that night, according to the custom still prevalent, her mother and two aunts took her upstairs while the wedding feast was still in progress. They undressed and bathed her. When she was tucked into bed, they gave her a glass of strong wine, sprinkled holy water on her face and left the room on tip-toe. She lay motionless for a little while, listening to the rain that had just begun to fall outside on to the dusty square and to the faint sound of fiddle music that reached her from the parlour. Then she heard a roar of tipsy laughter and there were heavy footsteps on the stairs. She gasped and sat up rigidly against the pillows. The ecstasy of martyrdom forsook her. She fully realised the horror of the fate that she had brought upon herself.

Presently the door was thrown open and her husband came into the room. He was a young man of splendid form, tall, with broad shoulders, kind blue eyes, rosy cheeks and curly yellow hair. He was noted in the district for his good nature and his shyness. He closed the door after him very gently and came to the foot of the bed. He stood there for a little while, with a broad grin on his bucolic face, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. Finally, he took a crushed flower from the buttonhole of his new black suit. He twirled the stem around and around between his fingers. Then he came to the head of the bed and offered it to Julia. She was staring at the ceiling with parted lips, as if unaware of his presence. She made no movement to accept

the flower. His face slowly darkened. Presently, he stepped back a pace, threw the flower angrily to the ground and cursed under his breath. He began to undress hastily. When he was stripped to his small shirt, he locked the door, put out the light, got into bed and possessed her with utmost violence.

They went away next morning for a honeymoon trip of ten days. Clancy was a changed man on his return. He had become sullen, brutal, drunken and insolent. He soon began to give orders in the shop as if he were sole master, although the marriage settlement had expressly stated the contrary. About a fortnight after his return, he and Bartly almost came to blows about the collection of a debt.

"Understand once and for all," Clancy said during the quarrel, "that I give orders here in future."

"You do no such thing," Bartly said. "It's written down that I give orders here as long as I live."

Then Clancy took the little man by the throat and said:

"One word more out of you and it will be your last."

Bartly offered no further resistance to his son-in-law. He went to his wife and bemoaned the unexpected outcome of the wedding he had so zealously promoted.

"Bloody woe!" he said. "I caught a Tartar in that young fellow. Oh! Boy! What a wolf in sheep's clothing he turned out to be!"

"Devil mend you!" his wife said spitefully. "I warned you against this marriage. Poor Julia! She looks like a ghost already and she married only a month. That drunkard will be the death of her."

Julia herself was entirely to blame for looking "like a ghost" and for all the evil that had come into Clancy's soul. She loathed her husband with her whole heart after he had taken her. She set out at once to make his life a torment. Night after night, as soon as they were in bed together, she began to goad him with extravagant tales of her relationship with Michael and of the mysterious power that the Fenian leader exercised over women. She hinted that she was still a victim of that mysterious power and that she was unable to banish him from her mind or heart, in spite of constant prayer. This vile attack always drove the foolish Clancy to a white heat of jealousy, which he tried to assuage by making savage love to her. His hatred of O'Dwyer became intense.

Then Raoul launched "the final assault" against Captain Butcher. The Committee issued an order to the people of Manister.

"The people are forbidden," ran the order, "as from this day, to render any service or pay any money to Captain Butcher, or to any member of his household, or to anybody acting on his behalf. The people are likewise forbidden to address Captain Butcher, or any member of his household, or anybody acting on his behalf, either in speech, or in gesture, or in writing. Any infringement of this order will be punished to whatever extent the Committee considers necessary, such punishment to be carried out by the competent authority duly appointed for that purpose."

Clancy rebelled at once against this order.

"I'll have none of it," he shouted that evening at the supper table. "I'm going to supply anybody from Manister House that comes into the shop, even if it happens to be Captain Butcher himself. What's more, I'm going to bid the time of day to anybody I please. I'm taking no orders from O'Dwyer and St. George."

"You don't know what you're saying," Bartly cried in fright.

On the glorious Sunday of his rebellion, he had allowed himself to be elected treasurer to the Committee. He was present when the order in question was passed unanimously. He clearly understood that he would be placed in an extremely delicate position by the refusal of his son-in-law to obey.

"I know well what I'm saying," Clancy said truculently.

"Do you know what would happen to anybody that dared to disobey?" said Bartly. "Have you any idea at all of what would be done to such a lunatic?"

"What would be done to him?" Clancy said.

"He'd get the back torn off him by the cat-o'-nine tails," Bartly said.

"There isn't a scut of a Fenian in the whole county that would dare touch me with the cat," Clancy cried arrogantly.

"They have touched better men than you, 'faith," Bartly said.

"Be careful what you say," Clancy said. "I'm in no humour to take any old guff from you."

"You fool!" cried Bartly. "It's not the Fenians alone you'd have to fight, but the whole people of Ireland, if you turned traitor. The National Land League was formed last week, with Parnell and Davitt at the head of it. The entire country has sworn allegiance to the League. There are Committees everywhere now. Anybody that dared raise a hand or a voice against the League . . ."

"That's a lie," Clancy said. "All the people are not for it, not by a long chalk. The Church is against it. The rich are against it."

"The poor are for it, though," said Bartly, "and they are in the big majority. It's the poor that always do the fighting. It's

them that will swing the cat, when it has to be swung. The rich won't save you. The rich and the bishops never save anybody's skin but their own."

"I dare them all," cried Clancy. "I dare them and I double dare them."

Later that night, Julia made certain that Clancy would carry out his threat to disobey.

"You have to be careful, Jim," she whispered solicitously when they were in bed together. "Michael is a dangerous man. He doesn't know the meaning of the word fear and he'll stop at nothing when he's roused. I saw him once . . ."

"Shut up," Clancy growled as he threw himself upon her. "I'll show you who is strong. I'll show you."

On the following afternoon, Andrew Fitzgerald brought a horse to the village forge from Manister House. He asked Matthew Cohan, the blacksmith, to put a set of new shoes on the animal. Cohan paid no attention to the groom. He continued to strike a red-hot bar of iron that he had on the anvil.

"Did you hear me talking to you, Matt?" the groom said in a louder tone.

Cohan spat and struck the iron bar another blow with his hammer. He took no notice of the question.

"Is it trying to insult me you are?" Andrew Fitzgerald cried as he began to pull off his jacket.

He had been drinking since noon. He got into the habit of drinking alone in his sleeping quarters when Barbara lost interest in him.

"Come on, then," he cried, spreading his jacket on the ground as a challenge. "If it's fight you want, there is my coat spread out before you. Step on it, if you think you are able to take the sway from me."

The blacksmith paused and glanced sideways at the jacket, with longing in his eyes. He was a huge fellow, noted in the district for his power as a wrestler and a weight-lifter. His glance shifted slowly from the coat to Andrew's widespread legs. He shuddered, spat on his palms, cursed under his breath and then brought the sledge-hammer down on the anvil with his whole power.

This gesture brought a roar of laughter from a crowd that had now gathered.

"What ails you, Matt?" a man shouted. "Is it how you itch where you can't scratch?"

Excited by the roar of the crowd, the horse took off at a gallop towards the demesne gate.

"Come on," Andrew shouted, now turning to the jeering people. "Fight me, if there is a man among you. You pack of rebels! I'll show you what a soldier of the Queen can do."

Clancy came running over from McNamara's shop at that moment.

"What's the matter, Andy?" he said to the groom.

The two of them had recently become cronies, while drinking late at night in the tap-room of Mahon's hotel.

"Matt Cohan, the dirty bastard," the groom said, "refuses to shoe my horse for me."

Clancy turned to the blacksmith and said:

"Is that right, Matt?"

Cohan looked at Clancy in contempt for a moment. Then he spat and began to strike his bar of iron small blows in rapid succession, while he muttered to himself.

"You ought to be ashamed, all of you," Clancy shouted, addressing the crowd. "You are being led astray by a gang of rowdies that will soon be outlawed. Any day now the Government will crack the whip. O'Dwyer and St. George won't be dictators for very long, I'm telling you. The hangman's rope is being greased for their necks."

Then he took the groom by the arm and said in a most friendly tone:

"Come on over to Mahon's for a wet."

As the two men approached the hotel, they were met by Sergeant Geraghty and two constables. One of the constables was leading the runaway horse. He gave the animal to the groom. Then the police advanced on the crowd. The people at once turned their backs and dispersed in silence.

"Mother of Mercy!" said Bartly, who had watched the whole scene from the doorway of his shop. "He's done it now, the fool."

Armed and masked men came that evening while the family was reciting the rosary. They seized Clancy in the name of the Committee. They blindfolded him in the yard. They took him to a cave on a small island off the coast. There he heard a man, whose voice he did not recognise, describe the incident at the forge in minute detail.

"Do you admit having made these statements and behaved in this way towards Captain Butcher's servant?" the man said at the end of his report.

"I'm proud of all I did and said," Clancy shouted with bravado.

"Do you realise that you disobeyed an order of the Manister Committee?" the man continued.

"I know it full well," said Clancy.

"Are you now ready to apologise and to swear that you will obey the Committee's orders in future?" the man said.

Clancy had become terribly afraid of the ruthless voice, which was made ghostly by the echo-making walls of the cave. Yet he stamped his foot and continued to behave with bravado.

"I dare you and I double dare you," he shouted. "No scut of a Fenian can put fear into me."

"Strip him," said the voice.

They stripped him to the waist and let his trousers fall down about his ankles, so that his buttocks also were bare. Finally, they tied his hands to an iron bolt that was embedded in the cave wall.

"You will now be given ten lashes," the voice said. "When the ten lashes have been delivered, there will be a pause of five minutes. You will again be asked to obey the Committee three times during the pause. If you still refuse to obey the people of Manister, the flogging will continue until you either die or relent."

The unknown man then raised his voice and said abruptly:

"Begin flogging."

There was a sharp report as the nine thongs of the whip struck at the tender white skin on Clancy's back. The hapless man ground his teeth and tried to brace himself against the savage pain. He failed. Although he was strong and in excellent condition, he surrendered after only seven blows had fallen.

"I'll obey," he screamed as the thongs went hissing through the air to deliver the eighth blow.

His whole back was covered with blood from rump to shoulder blades. The skin and surface flesh had been torn to ribbons. They made him kneel and take a solemn oath of obedience. They then dressed his wounds and put on his clothes.

"If you mention anything that happened to-night," the voice said to him, as he was being taken to the mainland, "you will be shot dead, together with your wife and parents."

They abandoned him on the highway, one mile east of the village.

"Run away home now," the voice said to him, after having removed the blindfold. "Take care not to look behind you. If you do we'll shoot."

One of the men had to give him a kick before he moved. He then began to walk at full speed, even though it pained him terribly to move his limbs. He went through the village without glancing towards his home. He was halfway to Clash before he lay

down on his stomach by the roadside for a rest. He burst into tears, with his face resting on his crossed arms.

"They shamed me," he moaned. "I'll never again be able to look anybody that knows me in the face."

He drank steadily during the remainder of the night and the early morning, at an obscure tavern on the outskirts of Clash. On leaving the tavern, he asked the woman of the house to make the sign of the Cross on his forehead with hot ashes from the hearth. Towards noon of that day, he withdrew some money he had on deposit at the savings bank in Clash and then took the train to Galway.

Julia got a short letter from him three days later.

"Fare thee well, dear wife," he wrote to her from Galway. "When you read these lines, I'll be on my way to Australia. A great shame was put on me, so that I could never again show my face. May God have mercy on us all and fare thee well."

Julia was stricken with remorse, now that her husband had met the fate she planned for him. She sat in the corner of the hearth most of each day, in a state of complete torpor.

"I'm afraid she's done for this time," her mother said to Bartly. "She wouldn't mind if you hit her on the head with a hammer. There isn't a word out of her, good or bad. Butter wouldn't melt in her mouth, she's that gentle. Lord save us! I'd rather she'd set the house on fire than sit like that."

Bartly just shrugged his shoulders.

"She has me destroyed entirely now," he said. "The worst that could happen to her would be less than she deserves, for I believe she is the cause of all our bad fortune."

The little man was in a truly odious position owing to Clancy's conduct. Hardly anybody came to the shop. People looked the other way when he met them in public.

On the morning of the day that Michael and Lettice were getting married, Julia awoke from her torpor. She put on a new black dress, button boots and a heavy veil.

"Arrah! Where are you going, all dressed up like a great lady?" her mother said to her.

"None of your business," Julia said as she bounced out of the house.

"Oho! God be praised!" her mother said. "You're back to your old devilment again."

Julia went to the church and knelt by the altar rails until the people came to see the wedding. They were angry with her for having come there dressed in black.

"The spiteful magpie should be tarred and feathered," they whispered in her hearing, "for trying to put bad luck on the beautiful young creatures that are getting married."

Julia was indifferent to their insults. Although her torpor had passed, her senses remained dulled. When Michael and Lettice went to the altar, she stared at them calmly as if they were strangers to her. She noted every detail of their dress and behaviour with womanly curiosity, without feeling chagrin of any sort. She even remained unaffected when Michael took Lettice in his arms and kissed her on the lips. It was only when the people followed the newly married couple out of the church and she was left alone that grief came to her.

It came with extreme violence. The interior of her body seemed to contract into a ball and to rush up into her throat, seeking exit. Then there was a moment of clarity, during which the agony of being lovelorn was made manifest to her with infinite skill. There was an eternity of suffering in that moment. She was certain that it was her last. Yet she passed from it into a state of exalted happiness. She became weak with delight. Her head dropped on to her shoulder and her arms could not maintain her body upright against the rails. She began to sink slowly to the ground. A mist came before her eyes and she heard the music of trumpets at a distance. Then her head struck against one of the wooden rails and the shock roused her. She resumed her former position hurriedly and looked towards the Statue of the Blessed Virgin. Then the music of the trumpets became loud and she was filled with awe. She passed into a trance during which she saw the statue rise from its pedestal and come towards her. It halted when it was so near that she could reach out and touch it with her hand. The Virgin smiled and her lips moved, as if she were speaking. Julia tried with all her wits to catch the words that Our Lady uttered. It was in vain. The statue began to retreat towards its pedestal. A feeling of infinite loneliness overwhelmed Julia as the Virgin reached her accustomed pedestal and became motionless. Then the mist evaporated.

Julia began to shout at the top of her voice, giving praise to the Virgin.

"House of Gold!" she cried. "Tower of Ivory!"

Pat Rice came running from the sacristy, attracted by her cries. He realised at once that she was in communion with the supernatural. He passed through the little wooden gate that led to the aisle and threw himself on his knees beside her. He began to strike his breast with both hands and to repeat her cries.

"Ark of the Covenant!" they intoned. "Morning Star!"

When Julia finally became silent through exhaustion, the sacristan leaned close to her and whispered in her ear:

"What did you see? Tell me everything, now while it's fresh in your mind."

Julia told him all that she had seen and heard.

"Ah! God forgive you," the sacristan said to her after he had heard her story. "There was a message, but it was denied to you on account of your sins. God's mother was trying to speak to you, but your soul wasn't pure enough."

"Ah! Woel!" cried Julia disconsolately. "Is that why I couldn't understand what she said?"

"Never mind, woman," cried the withered old man. "She will speak to us again through you. You must purify yourself by prayer and fasting and penance, in order to be ready for the message when it comes again. We'll get our group together and come here with you every day, to pray and do penance."

Then he bowed down before her, touching the ground with his forehead.

"You have been chosen," he cried exultantly. "You are blessed among women. Oh! Heavenly Grandeur! Brightness of all Brightness!"

As she walked home slowly, Julia kept smiling like a foolish person. She had been transported "into a world of her own" by the sacristan's words of homage and by his gesture. She believed that she was blessed among women.

"Lord save us!" Mrs. McNamara said on seeing her daughter's strange smile of rapture. "What's taken hold of you again? Oh! Lord! What new lunacy is this?"

Julia marched upstairs without speaking or even glancing at her mother. She threw herself backwards on her bed without even removing her veil. She clasped her hands behind her neck and stared at the ceiling, smiling in rapture.

She felt wise and triumphant.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ELIZABETH WAS VERY ANGRY after her return from the parochial house. She sat down in the living-room without even removing her hat and cloak.

"It's outrageous," she said. "I'd never believe it possible that he could adopt such an attitude, if I had not heard him with my own ears."

The whole family had assembled to hear the result of her interview with Father Cornelius. Michael and Lettice sat hand in hand on the sofa. Father Francis crouched over the fire, Raoul stood gloomily looking out the window, against which a squall of driven rain was beating.

"What was his attitude, Aunt Elizabeth?" Lettice said gently, "Was it really very hostile?"

"I would have forgiven him for being genuinely hostile," Elizabeth said. "It was something far worse than mere hostility."

"No need to lose your temper over a third-rate provincial like Father Costigan," said Raoul. "What did the fellow say? Nothing that could possibly be described as straightforward, I warrant."

Elizabeth turned towards Father Francis and said:

"Why do you remain silent? The people would respect your opinion."

Father Francis looked at her sadly and shook his head.

"My lips are sealed," he whispered.

"Well! Mine are not," said Elizabeth.

"Tell us what happened without more ado," said Raoul irritably.

"He received me most cordially," Elizabeth said. "Although I am now convinced that he is an arrant rogue, I admit that he has the manners of a grand gentleman. Frankly, I felt ashamed of having come to upbraid him, after listening for a few minutes to his subtle flattery. I was forced to interrupt him and to broach the subject of the apparition bluntly, fearing that I might be won over to his side unless I made haste to speak. The effect was astonishing. He withdrew into his shell at once and said coldly: 'I'm afraid that I cannot accept the word superstition, when used in connection with the events to which you refer.' I lost my temper at this point. 'What else could you call it?' I cried in indignation. 'Three weeks ago, Father Cornelius, a light-headed young woman claimed to have seen the statue of the Blessed Virgin leave its pedestal and come floating towards her on a cloud, variously described as blue and pale yellow. They can't even agree on the colour of the cloud. If she was really privileged to see anything of the sort, which I doubt, I most heartily congratulate her. However, we have only her own word for it. There were no witnesses. The woman is known to have a very fertile imagination, together with a vicious nature.' Then I told him about the attack on Tim Ahearn. 'It's very odd,' I continued, 'that Pat Rice, who helped her get Ahearn mobbed and stoned, should arrive so quickly on the scene of the alleged apparition.

Don't you think it quite possible, Father Cornelius, that Rice and this woman planned the whole story in cold blood, in order to delude honest folk?' He looked at me for a long time in silence. Then he said: 'I don't indulge in scandalous suppositions.' I was hurt to the quick. It was tantamount to accusing me of not being a lady. Nevertheless, I continued to plead with him. 'For ten days,' I said, 'an ever-increasing crowd followed this young woman to the church every evening, hoping for a repetition of the miracle. Poor wretches! I don't blame them for their credulity. They have become hysterical with fear. The crops have failed miserably again this year. The vile Government is sending troops into the villages. Threats of most repressive measures are being broadcast daily by those on high. It's no wonder that the poor are ready to believe in a sign of redemption, no matter how extravagant and improbable. Nothing out of the ordinary happened for ten days, much to the disappointment of these poor folk. The statue did not move again. There was no manifestation that could possibly be called supernatural. So that a number of people began to jeer quite openly at the insane creature's pretensions. She then decided it was time to act, in order to maintain her following. On the tenth evening, she threw herself prostrate on the floor, in the middle of the aisle. She foamed at the mouth and writhed like an epileptic. Finally, she screamed at the top of her voice, saying that she had just received a message from Our Lady. Do you know what the message was, Father Cornelius?' Again he looked at me for some time in stony silence. Then he said solemnly, looking me straight between the eyes: 'Antichrist must go.' Incredible as it may seem, he uttered this ludicrous phrase as if he really believed it came straight from Our Lady. I felt outraged. 'You must know,' I continued, 'that this phrase has been the catch-cry of a certain faction among your parishioners during the past months. The faction has tried to stir up opposition to my brother. Your sacristan, your housekeeper and the creature that saw the statue move are its leading spirits. Don't you find it odd that their catch-cry should be identical with the message allegedly received from Our Lady? Or do you deny that my brother has been publicly referred to by members of this faction as the Antichrist?' He sighed, laced his fingers across his chest and launched forth into a long-winded discourse on recent signs and apparitions. 'It would be wrong,' he said, 'to isolate Mrs. Clancy's experiences from the chain of similar events, that have occurred during the past several weeks in various other parts of the county. These miraculous signs and apparitions have occurred mainly on the scene of revolutionary

disorders, at places where the faithful had been momentarily led away from God by wicked ideas. I need only draw your attention to the well-authenticated apparitions at Knock, where many miraculous cures have already taken place and to which thousands of pilgrims are flocking from all parts of Ireland and Great Britain. Surely you could not possibly suspect the miracles at Knock of being a criminal plot against your brother?" "Did I suggest that they were?" I cried. "I never even mentioned them." "It would be quite useless for you," he said, "to make any such attempt. There is not a shred of evidence to support such a preposterous claim." "But I made no such claim," I cried, becoming exasperated. "I tell you that I never even mentioned Knock. I only mentioned Manister." "It is impossible to isolate Manister from Knock," he said. "That is shameful quibbling," I said helplessly. "I know there is a plot and so do you. All this talk about Knock is a trick. You are using the apparition at Knock as a cloak behind which to hide." He gripped the arms of his chair and stared at me in horror for a few moments. Then he leaned forward and said: "Did I hear you say that a belief in miracles is superstition?" "You heard nothing of the sort," I cried, "and it's contemptible of you to pretend that you did." He shrugged his shoulders. "I will admit," I continued, "that I deplore any kind of vulgar hysteria casting its shadow on the glorious traditions of the Catholic Church. I also object, in the strongest possible manner, to having religion made the handmaid of oppression and tyranny." At this point he threw out his hands in a gesture of horror. "That is an atheistic remark, Miss St. George," he said, "and I'm deeply pained to hear you make it. It's a time-worn cant phrase of atheists and communists. It is shocking that a noble lady like yourself should have become contaminated by such hideous ideas." I got to my feet in wrath. "Hideous, did you say?" I cried. He also got to his feet, bowed to me and said meekly: "The struggle to save souls is universal, like the Church herself. Manifestations of divine displeasure cannot be seen in the light of any single individual's problems. All are equal in the eyes of God and all merit equal attention." He went on ranting in this vein for quite some time. It was all Greek to me. He was very likely trying to change the subject gracefully. In any case, I knew by then that he was not to be side-tracked from his vile purpose. I'm now certain that he is the prime mover of the plot. He was far too clever for me. I could not force him to commit himself. I took my leave, silent and crestfallen."

She looked at Raoul and added, with tears in her eyes:

"I'm sorry that I failed you so miserably."

"Not a word more, Lizzie," Raoul said with feeling as he hurried to her.

He bowed low over her hand.

"You are a tower of strength to me," he said. "It was most gracious of you to have suffered such annoyance for my sake. I didn't for a moment expect you to succeed in getting him to denounce the plot. On the other hand, I am now certain that his henchmen are going to act to-morrow. It's always good to be forewarned."

He turned towards Father Francis and said briskly:

"I still have one more card to play. I'm going to play it to-morrow, before they can remove me from the Committee."

Michael had been leaning against the back of the sofa, with his eyes fixed on the ceiling. Now he sat forward abruptly, put his clenched fists on his knees and looked intently at Raoul.

"Let me deal with the leaders of this faction," he said. "I assure you that I'll bring them to their senses at once. They'll make no further trouble."

"By force?" Raoul said.

Michael did not reply.

"I absolutely forbid you to do anything of the sort," Raoul said after a pause. "You would only make matters worse. The vast majority of the people now side with Father Costigan. All the members of the Committee, except one, are opposed to me. It's no longer a small faction with which we are confronted. To-morrow the people of Manister intend to depose me and elect Father Costigan as chairman."

"Why allow the Committee to meet to-morrow?" Michael said. "I could attend to them to-night. To-morrow we could nominate trustworthy men to take their place."

"That would be substituting one form of tyranny for another," said Raoul.

Michael jumped to his feet. He stood erect and motionless, in front of the sofa. His face darkened.

"I don't understand you," he said in a low voice.

"I told you at our first conference in my study," Raoul said, "that the support of the whole people is necessary for the successful isolation of Captain Butcher."

"We have that support," Michael said. "Our orders have been obeyed so far, with very few exceptions. Those who disobeyed were quickly brought to their senses."

"The support must be voluntary and enthusiastic," Raoul said. "One can enforce obedience for a time by means of the knout

and the torch and the gun, but not for long. Especially when the enemy is also practising the same kind of violence, with immeasurably greater resources."

"That is not what you have taught me," Michael said. "You have taught me that discipline must be enforced ruthlessly on the many by the few."

"Granted," said Raoul, "but I have not taught you that it can be imposed without authority from the people. I have maintained, and I still maintain it, that the many must grant authority to enforce discipline to the few, before it can be enforced."

Michael walked stiff-legged towards Raoul. He did not come to a halt until he was quite close. Then he crossed his arms on his chest. He was still looking intently at Raoul.

"The people have granted that authority," he said quietly.

"To-morrow they will withdraw it," Raoul said.

"They have no right to do so," Michael said. "Once an enemy has been engaged in battle, nobody has a right to turn back. Nobody has a right to turn coward."

They stared at one another in silence for a long time. There was a feeling of great tension in the room.

"What card do you intend playing to-morrow?" Michael said at length.

Elizabeth rose hurriedly and went over to the sofa. She sat down and took Lettice by the hand. Lettice had turned very pale. She was staring at the floor with her lips parted.

"I'm going to get myself arrested for making a seditious speech," Raoul said.

"Why?" said Michael.

"As a last effort to win the people over to our side," Raoul said.

"It will be difficult to denounce a man who is in jail as Antichrist and an enemy of the people."

"That is a trick," Michael said. "We set out to teach the people how to become soldiers. We can't teach them by such tricks as that."

"It has always been permissible in war," Raoul said, "to meet guile with guile."

"If you go to jail," Michael said, "Father Costigan will become chairman of the Committee."

"Undoubtedly," said Raoul. "He has the people with him. All we can try to do is to make him adopt as much as possible of our programme. It's not we who are important, but our programme."

"You mean to say that I must obey him if he is elected chairman," Michael said.

"I'm afraid so," said Raoul.

Michael stared in silence for a little while.

"In future," he said at length, "I'm not going to take orders from anyone. I've lost confidence in you and I consider Father Costigan to be a contemptible shyster. I'm going to finish what we began, in my own way."

"Very well, Michael," Raoul said calmly. "I have just one favour to ask of you."

"What is it?" Michael said.

"Do nothing for twenty-four hours," Raoul said. "Allow me to make my statement in public to-morrow."

"Agreed," Michael said.

Then he turned away and strode quickly to the door.

"Michael!" Lettice cried as she got to her feet.

He halted by the door and looked at her. She came running across the floor. She halted when she was still a little distance away from him. She stood with her feet close together and her hands drawn straight down her sides, like a timid little girl.

"May I come with you?" she said softly.

He shook his head. His face showed no emotion.

"You remember what I told you after the storm?" he said tenderly.

She nodded.

"I must go alone," he said.

"I understand," Lettice whispered.

Michael turned and passed out of the room.

"He who sows the wind," Raoul said as he put his fingers to the tip of his beard, "reaps the whirlwind."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE VILLAGE SQUARE LOOKED DESOLATE. All night there had been a high wind accompanied by intermittent squalls of heavy rain. Now the autumn glory of the trees was spent. The gaily coloured leaves, to which capricious Nature had given such beauty at their hour of death, were torn from the branches. The rain-darkened trunks looked all forlorn in their unaccustomed nakedness. The houses, too, were sombre and unkempt after the gale. There were dirty tracks down their painted walls. The ground was dotted with pools of stagnant water on which dead leaves floated. Up above in the grey sky,

the pale lack-lustre face of the sun kept peeping from behind the torn clouds as it rolled west.

Shortly before noon, Tim Ahearn brought a horse and cart into the square. The village carpenter was with him. They halted near the monument and lowered a small wooden platform from the cart. They placed it carefully in position on a level spot. It was four feet high and it had steps up one side. The carpenter climbed on top of it and stamped with both feet, to make sure that it was properly balanced. Then he nodded to Ahearn and came down.

At that moment, Sergeant Geraghty approached and said gruffly:

"What's that thing you have there?"

"It's a platform," Ahearn said.

"What are you going to do with it?" the sergeant said.

The carpenter looked furtively at Geraghty. Then he nodded again to Ahearn and walked away quickly towards his house. He was obviously glad to be rid of a dangerous association.

"How long are you going to leave it here?" the sergeant said to Ahearn.

"My master told me to tell you," Ahearn said, scratching his forehead slowly, "that this platform is a personal convenience he intends to use within the hour, that it's not obstructing the public thoroughfare and that you have no authority to interfere with it."

He took in a deep breath after finishing his speech, which he had obviously learned by rote. Then he mounted the cart, whipped the horse and drove away at a brisk trot.

"That fellow is getting too big for his boots lately," the sergeant said, giving one of the platform legs a vicious little kick. "I'm going to flatten his ears for him one of these days."

He walked over to the barracks, which now resembled a small fortress. The windows were sandbagged and there was a thick wall, with firing points, all along the front. Two constables with carbines stood guard behind the wall. About two dozen other constables lounged in a group some distance farther up the square. Several more could be seen walking to and fro within the gate of Butcher's demesne. All these men were part of a considerable force, that had been sent to Manister House during the past week, to protect Butcher from the Fenians.

Geraghty called one of the constables.

"Go on up to Manister House," he said after the man had approached, "and notify Sub-Inspector Lodge that Mr. St. George is about to make a speech in the village square. Say that

I think Mr. St. George intends to provoke the authorities for reasons of his own, judging by remarks that his servant made. Tell him to come at once, because there is going to be skin and hair flying here shortly, or my name isn't Patrick Geraghty."

After the man had gone, the sergeant kicked at a small stone and muttered:

"I'd like to break that Ahearn's jaw, so I would. Trying to teach me the law, is he?"

Bartly McNamara walked across the square towards the Father Matthew Hall, with his hands clasped underneath the flapping tails of his black broadcloth coat. He held himself jauntily erect. He glanced from side to side in an arrogant manner. His lips were parted in a half-smile of boastful triumph. His watery eyes, that used to be so furtive, looked confident and steady behind his spectacles.

He was a changed man of late. At the moment when he thought that all was lost, the apparition had put him on his feet again. Instead of being a devilish nuisance, Julia had become his benefactress. There were more customers than ever coming into his shop. People went out of their way in public to greet him and pay him compliments. Father Cornelius was again his intimate friend. Best of all was the conviction, entertained by his wife, and by himself, that Julia was with child. She had developed a healthy appetite during the past fortnight. Her cheeks had begun to fill. Her complexion had the glow of well-being. There was an expression of peace and fulfilment in her beautiful eyes. She had become silent and lazy. Although now a person of great honour in the district, she made no attempt to parade herself. On the contrary, she appeared to have become sated with exaltation. She had been to church only for the purpose of hearing Mass since receiving the message from Our Lady. Neither did she show interest in anything connected with her abnormal experience. She behaved exactly as an expectant young mother should behave, laying in great store of energy for the miracle of life that was being consummated within her womb. So that Bartly was already having drunkening day-dreams, during which he danced a crowing grandson on his knees.

A group of twenty men, all members of the Committee, waited for him by the door of the Father Matthew Hall. As he approached this group, he nodded towards the platform.

"So that's how it is," he cried indignantly as he took the key of the door from his hip pocket. "So he intends to make a speech. Instead of coming before the Committee and resigning like a gentleman, he wants to make an appeal to the people over our

heads. Could anything be more treacherous? He's going to try pulling the wool over their eyes with his cunning talk."

Nobody said anything in answer to this tirade. The group followed him into the hall very hurriedly. They all seemed anxious to get under cover.

"Are we all here?" Bartly said, after the door had been closed behind the last of them.

"All our crowd is here," said Cleary, the retired pig-jobber. "There are only Mr. St. George and Anthony Cooney, the schoolmaster, missing from the whole Committee."

The Committee had originally consisted of five members. One of these was a fisherman called Hernon, an extremely devout man that Father Costigan was easily able to use as his secret agent. Acting on the parish priest's instructions, Hernon soon began to urge that new members be co-opted. He claimed that the Committee's influence among the people would be broadened by this means. The proposal appeared reasonable to the unsuspecting Raoul. So that eighteen more men, all of them narrow-minded and superstitious, were ultimately added to the original five. When the popular enthusiasm gave way to fear, the nineteen adherents of the parish priest were able to win McNamara and Cleary over to their side. Only one man remained loyal to Raoul. He was Anthony Cooney, a member of the Fenian Society and secretary to the Committee.

"Where is Cooney?" Bartly said truculently. "Does he think, just because he is secretary, that he can stop us getting rid of Mr. St. George by staying away from here?"

"There is more to it than that," said Tom Crampton, the village stonemason.

He walked over to Bartly and put one hand on the little shop-keeper's shoulder. Then he looked about him dramatically. He had a long broad back like a woman, together with short stout legs that were deeply bowed. His face was sallow and bloodless, like so many of his trade.

"I happen to know," he continued in a tense whisper, "that the schoolmaster has taken to the hills."

"Blood in ounce!" said Bartly. "Is that the truth? Has he gone on his keeping?"

"Devil a word of a lie in it, Bartly," another man said.

"Indeed, I'd be glad to see him go," Crampton said, "only for the two blankets that he took with him. He's been lodging in my house now for two years, ever since he came to Manister. I never made a penny piece out of him. Far from it. He owes me plenty. It's only now and again that he would condescend to pay

me a few shillings of his board money. Yet he's such a likeable fellow that I never had the heart to make him fork out the arrears. Poor man! He was great value during the long winter evenings. He would sit in the hearth corner with a jug of ale, telling gorgeous tales of love and war. Don't be talking, man. He could draw either tears or laughter from a stone with his enchanted words."

He paused, looked about him furtively and added in a lower tone:

"Before going away with the two new blankets, he woke me out of my sleep and gave me a message for the Committee. He repeated it several times, so I would be sure to remember it. He said: 'Tell the Committee and Father Costigan as well that they have no more power over the people of Manister. It's the Fenians now that have the power. From now on, the Fenians recognise no authority but their own. They are setting up martial law and everybody must obey them without a word. It will be death for anybody, friend or foe, that lifts a finger to oppose them.' Having said these woeful words, he made off to the hills with my two new blankets. Ah! God help him! He's his own worst enemy. In spite of the blankets and what he owes me, I wish him luck."

Bartly was dumbfounded by this news. He lost the new-found arrogance that had sat so well on him. It had seemed to him a simple matter to get rid of Raoul and lead the people back to the authority of the Church. The opposition of the Fenians put a different face on things. He was afraid of meeting Clancy's fate, or even worse.

"Blood in ounce!" he said. "So the Fenians have gone on their keeping."

"O'Dwyer has called them all out, Cleary said. "It's going to be open war now between themselves and the Government. The people of Manister will be in the middle, battered by both sides, like flannel in the thickening through."

"Blood in ounce!" Bartly said. "What are we to do now?"

Again he wanted to run away and hide, just as on the day of the rebellion, when the armed police came into view.

"We'll do what we planned to do," shouted Hernon, the fisherman. "We'll force Mr. St. George to resign. Then you and Cleary and myself, the three men that asked St. George to become our leader, will lead the people back to the chapel in procession. There we'll beg Father Cornelius on bended knees to forgive us and take command as before."

Hernon was in "a holy rage." He was a short and bull-necked man, with a skull that was almost perfectly round, stiff red hair

and a freckled face. His little grey eyes were surmounted by huge eyebrows of a whitish colour, which gave him rather a ferocious appearance. He had formerly been a jolly man and very much addicted to drunken roistering. Then he got caught in a hurricane that took his nobby and his crew to the bottom of the ocean. He lashed himself to a raft and promised to lead a holy life if he escaped. That was how he became devout and fierce, instead of being a jolly toper.

"That's all very well," Bartly said, "but the Fenians are going to put a foot in all our plans."

"To hell with the Fenians!" said Hernon. "The English Government will soon put them under foot. They deserve the worst that can be given to them, for they are against God. They are excommunicated by bell, book and candle-light. Every honest man will help the English put them down."

Many of those present were outraged by this statement. Although opposed to the Fenians, because of panic, the thought of collaborating with the foreign tyrant against Irish patriots filled them with horror.

"It would only be a black traitor that would help the English to do no matter what to an Irishman patriot," Cleary said. "I'm for the parish priest and against St. George, but I refuse to become a renegade."

"I'm with you," another man shouted.

Several other men shouted their approval of Cleary's words.

"The Fenians are against God," Hernon shouted. "They want revolution. The people want peace and lower rents. Down with the Fenians, I say."

"Down with the Fenians!" shouted the majority of those present.

A violent argument ensued. McNamara ran from one group to another trying to restore order. It was of no avail. Blows seemed imminent. Men were spitting on their ash plants, pulling down their hat brims and flexing their shoulder muscles. Then they heard yelling in the square. Forgetting their quarrel, they all rushed to the door and opened it.

"Ho! By the Book!" cried Bartly. "Here comes St. George now, riding in his carriage like the Sultan of the bloody Moors."

Raoul had crossed the little wooden bridge just as the head of a large throng, coming from the church, debouched into the foot of the square. The throng began to shout on catching sight of him. Most of the people brandished their sticks and reviled him. A small group of young men, however, ran forward and cheered his name. They formed a guard about his carriage with their

bodies as he advanced. The hostile majority, although eager to do him violence forthwith, was without resolute leadership. So they merely pressed after him up through the square, shouting their hatred.

"Antichrist must go!" chanted those opposed to Raoul.

"Up St. George!" cried the small band of his supporters.

Raoul sat stiffly erect in his carriage, staring straight ahead, his right hand cupped under his left elbow, the fingers of his left hand caressing the tip of his beard. He was wearing his black hat, black cloak, velvet jacket and buckled shoes. The carriage, although newly painted and upholstered, was more than thirty years old and of a type long since become unfashionable. His dress and the carriage and his proud demeanour seemed to be in perfect harmony with the tragic face of nature and with the howling mob. Ahearn also seemed to have achieved dignity at this moment, as he sat on the high driving seat, straining to hold the agitated horse to a stately walk.

As the carriage neared the platform, the Constabulary came marching out from the demesne gate at a rapid pace. Sub-Inspector Lodge strode at the head of the column. The crowd became subdued on seeing the armed men. When the carriage halted, there was dead silence except for the rhythmic crash of marching feet.

Raoul dismounted and ordered Ahearn to drive away. The servant looked in mournful appeal at his master for a moment. Then he suddenly gave the horse its head. The frightened animal set off through the crowd at a mad gallop. There were wild screams from a number of people that were forced to jump hurriedly out of the way. Ahearn flicked several of them neatly on the rump with the end of his long whip, while pretending to lash the horse. He hated them at that moment for being disloyal to his master.

Raoul climbed on to the platform and looked about him. The bulk of the Constabulary had now come to a halt, in two ranks, on the outskirts of the crowd. They ordered arms and stood alertly to attention. A small force, led by Sub-Inspector Lodge, pressed towards the platform. The people made way for their advance, like water parting before the tall bow of a ship. Raoul waited until the Sub-Inspector and his men had reached the foot of the platform. Then he took off his hat, bowed to the people, leaned slightly against his cane and began to speak.

"People of Manister," he said, "you asked me some months ago to become your leader. I accepted. We elected a Committee and gave it full power to rule over the territory occupied by you.

Since then we have succeeded in destroying nearly all trace of the English Queen's authority over that territory. We have imposed our own authority and made our writ run without any difficulty. We have Captain Butcher isolated and on the verge of destruction. We have completely eliminated the espionage system of the enemy. These are great achievements, in so short a time, by people unused to the exercise of power and to the possession of freedom. Alas! Freedom is not a gift that the few can bestow on the many. In order to be free, it is not sufficient for the people to defeat tyranny. Unless they have the souls of free men and unless they are jealous of their dignity, in the way that free men are jealous of it, the defeat of one tyrant merely leads to the seizure of power by another. That is what happened to you. You have withdrawn your allegiance from Captain Butcher and the English Queen, only to bow down in terror before the mumblings of priestcraft. You no longer wish me to remain at your head. You call me Antichrist and demand that I resign. I submit. Base though you are at this moment, you have the right to take away what you bestowed. I bow to your will."

He bowed low in all directions. Then he glanced down at two sergeants, who were writing his words in their notebooks. He smiled and turned towards the people once more.

"I have no right to find fault with your fickleness," he continued, "because it was my ancestors that made you slaves and taught you the habits of slavery over a period of six hundred years. These habits cannot be changed by the stroke of a magic wand. The soldierly virtues of free men can only be regained by you through torture of soul and body. What are these soldierly virtues? They are loyalty, discipline and dignity. Although I have put dignity last, it is the most important of the three. I put it last because it is the result of the other two. Already a few of you have attained these virtues. I refer to the gallant members of the Fenian Society. If you were all like the Fenians, as brave and resolute as they, you could sweep all enemies from your land at once."

He raised his stick and pointed to the Constabulary.

"You could annihilate these ruffians," he cried, "cut them to pieces and throw the pieces to your dogs. You could sweep Captain Butcher and all other landlords to the devil. You could even cross the sea into England and chop off Queen Victoria's head for her impudence in laying claim to sovereignty over you. You could . . ."

At that moment, Sub-Inspector Lodge raised his hand and called out in an angry tone:

"I command you to stop speaking at once."

At the same time, one of the sergeants climbed on to the platform.

"What is the meaning of this interruption?" Raoul said.

"Come down from that platform," the Sub-Inspector said.

"Come along quietly, sir," the sergeant said, laying his hand on Raoul's arm.

A confused murmur ran through the crowd as Raoul came down from the platform.

"I arrest you on a charge of making seditious utterances," the Sub-Inspector said to Raoul at the foot of the platform. "I ask you to come with me quietly into custody."

Raoul nodded and said pleasantly:

"Of course, Inspector."

They surrounded him and marched him towards the barracks through the crowd.

"They have taken him," the people whispered to one another.

At first it seemed that the whole throng had been won over to Raoul's side. For a few moments, there was no opposition to the murmur of sympathy that rose from end to end of the multitude. Then there was a scream. It came from Hernon, the fisherman. Taken with a fit of mystical frenzy, he ran up to the police cordon, glared at Raoul savagely, beat his bosom with his clenched fists and continued to scream.

"Now where is your dignity?" he cried. "They have taken you, Antichrist, in spite of your power."

He leaped high into the air and then brought both feet down flat together, like a man doing the dance of the sea-salmon. His eyeballs now protruded and he was foaming at the mouth.

"Oho!" he cried in maniacal glee. "Look at the humbug! King Raoul! The man that was going to teach us dignity! Look at him now and he taken away under guard like a common thief. Antichrist! Free yourself and show us your power. Show us your dignity, you that talk so much about it. Free yourself now, you that . . ."

He was interrupted by a violent blow from an ash-plant that crashed on to the top of his skull. He went down like an ox under the hammer.

"Up St. George!" cried the man that had delivered the blow. "The Fenians *Abu!*"

Hundreds of sticks were raised at once. Blows began to fall on all sides amid frenzied shouting. The main body of Constabulary then charged with levelled carbines into the struggling mass.

The people fought one another and the Constabulary indiscriminately for a little while. Then they took to headlong flight, all together, as if by prearrangement. They ran back the way they had come, down the square and out on to the road that led east to the church. The police did not follow.

Bartly McNamara climbed on top of a stone wall some distance east of the square and addressed the fugitives.

"Stop running," he shouted. "There's nobody after you now. Halt and gather round me."

Other men added their voices to that of Bartly. In a short while, the whole throng gathered round the little shopkeeper.

"In God's name," he said to them, "listen to me. We have been here and there, you and I, during the past few months. It's little profit we have to show for our travels. Let us go back, then, to him we deserted and let us ask him to forgive us. Let us go to him on our knees and ask him to become our leader once again."

The people shouted their assent with enthusiasm.

"All right, then," Bartly said. "Follow me."

In dead silence, the people marched up the hill behind McNamara. They made no attempt to form ranks or to march in step like soldiers. When the head of the disorderly throng reached the church gate, Father Cornelius came out of the sacristy, wearing his soutane and his biretta.

"Down on your knees and off with your hats," Bartly said to the people.

The whole throng knelt reverently on the wet road, uncovered their heads and bowed low.

"Take command over us, Father," they prayed. "Forgive us and take command."

Father Cornelius climbed to the flat top of the gate-post. He took off his biretta, raised his right hand and made the sign of the Cross on the air above the kneeling people.

CHAPTER XXX

FENTON JUMPED TO HIS FEET, thinking he had heard footsteps come along the corridor. After listening intently for a little while, he made a grimace of annoyance. There was only the whistling of the wind, in the chimney and outside among the eaves. He put more coal on the fire. Then he walked around the room for the twentieth time, setting things in order. He pulled

the window curtains a little tighter, shifted the sofa and drew the armchair somewhat closer to the fire. As he paused before the mirror to give his uniform a final touch, he became appalled by his appearance. The last few weeks, during which he definitely made up his mind to desert his post without warning, had taken a heavy toll.

"Good God!" he said. "I look positively ill."

He lowered the lamp in order to conceal his features and the shabbiness of the room. That helped a great deal, in so far as the furniture was concerned. In the gloaming that now prevailed, even the torn elbow of the old armchair took on a romantic look.

He was on the point of sitting down again when he heard the approach of footsteps about which there could be no doubt. They were measured and heavy, like those of a military person. He hurried to the door angrily, thinking it was one of his subordinates come to disturb him at this most inopportune moment.

"What is it now?" he cried, throwing open the door.

To his amazement, a cavalry officer went striding past him into the room without speaking. He was about to ask the meaning of the stranger's intrusion when he caught the faint scent of a perfume that he recognised. He closed the door and put his back to it.

"Barbara," he said, "you gave me a frightful shock."

She laughed and turned round slowly, holding herself stiff and erect. Her bearing was quite as soldierly as that of any man. With the collar of the greatcoat turned up to her chin and the hat pulled far down on her forehead, she really looked the part of a Dragoon captain.

"How did you recognise me?" she said.

"Your perfume," he said in a tone of annoyance. "Surely this is not the time to attract attention by indulging in masquerade."

"Don't you think I'd attract more attention in my usual costume?" she said gaily. "The hotel people would certainly find it rather odd that a married lady should sneak upstairs to your chambers on a wild night like this."

"Forgive me," he said, after swallowing his breath with difficulty.

He locked the door and came towards her.

"What's the matter, Jim?" she said.

"I've been waiting so long," he muttered. "My nerves are on edge."

She threw her hat on a chair and stretched out her hands towards him.

"Now it is I who am kept waiting," she said.

"My darling!" he said as he took her in his arms.

This was the moment for which he had longed so ardently. Yet he was tormented by rancour and suspicion, even while the touch of her lips sent a wave of passion surging through his veins. He had expected to find her in a mood of tenderness and sombre exaltation, as on that glorious day in Lord Mongoole's garden, when she had confessed her love. Instead of that, she was now behaving like a tomboy playing a wild prank. Furthermore, he found her body a little frightening to touch. It seemed to vibrate spasmodically, as if from tiny electric shocks.

"I feel utterly exhausted," she said after they had drawn apart. "Help me remove this greatcoat. It's a ton weight."

After he had taken the greatcoat, she went to the fire and put her hands to the blaze.

"The wind was piercing," she said. "I feel chilled to the marrow of my bones."

"I'll get you some wine," Fenton said.

She put her back to the fire, spread her booted legs wide on the hearth rug and said to him:

"You are annoyed with my uniform."

Fenton looked back at her over his shoulder, just as he was about to pour wine from the decanter. The highly-ornamented tunic, the tight-fitted breeches and the shining jack boots made her sensual beauty more than usually alluring. At the same time, the warlike male dress brought the latent cruelty of her features into relief. Even her lovely golden eyes, normally sombre and melancholy, were now puckishly alert, as if intent on vulgar mischief.

"You look ravishing as a Dragoon," he said coldly. "Where did you get the uniform?"

"It belonged to my first husband," she said excitedly. "He was in the Inniskillings. He and I were almost exactly the same size. We often exchanged clothes and showed ourselves in public. We were always taken for granted. It was wonderful sport. I kept this uniform when he died, as a memento of those adventures. I think I told you that I was once an actress. I adore masquerade."

"How very interesting!" Fenton said still more coldly, as he handed her a glass of wine.

With a quick turn of her wrist she put the wine to her lips and drank it all at once. Then she laughed and put the empty glass on the mantelpiece.

"You are angry with me, Jim," she said, going to the sofa. "Tell me what is troubling you."

She sat down and stretched out her legs to their full length.

"We must leave nothing unsaid," she added, "at the beginning of our great adventure."

"Adventure?" Fenton said. "Is that all it means to you, Barbara?"

"Sit down, please," Barbara said, suddenly becoming very serious. "I, too, have found it hard to wait. So you must forgive me for having been a little silly just now. You must be considerate of a woman's failings, Jim."

She allowed her voice to become very tender as she uttered the last sentence. The result on Fenton was immediate. He threw himself on his knees before her, seized her right hand and kissed it frantically. Then he looked up into her face and began to speak in a very agitated fashion.

"I have been living on memories of that day," he cried passionately. "I have kept recalling every word you said, over and over again, sometimes all through the live-long night. Every word has become sacred to me. Everything you wore on that day, every ringlet of your hair, every gesture you made is stored in my memory. They are all still there, fresh and clear, like precious gems that I take out from time to time, when I am alone, to caress and fondle."

He rose abruptly and sat close to her on the sofa, still clasping her hand.

"Oh! Barbara," he continued, "what you said to me that day ennobled me and washed away my dishonour. I implore you to tell me now that they came from your heart. Tell me that you haven't changed since then and that you spoke sincerely that day."

Barbara shuddered and said in a low voice:

"I assure you that I spoke sincerely and that I have not changed since then. You should know by now that I'm not a fickle person, Jim."

"Thank God," Fenton said with fervour. "My love for you is now my whole life. I have nothing else left."

Again he began to kiss her hand frantically.

"Calm yourself, Jim," Barbara said. "Of course I have not changed. Not in the least."

Fenton raised his head and looked at her wildly.

"You must come away with me at once," he cried. "We must go away from here, far away from all this infamy."

"Be calm, Jim," Barbara said. "Not at once. We must be practical."

"Every moment that I stay here is a torture," Fenton said. "I

detest having to live in a lie. It was difficult for me to make up my mind. As a man of honour, I found it hard to break with everything that I had been taught to reverence. That's why I want to leave at once, now that I've made a clean sweep. I can't bear to go on deceiving people. Deception is one of the most dishonourable of crimes."

"I insist that we must wait a little longer," Barbara said. "I'm just as anxious to leave as you are, but we must be practical."

"How long?" Fenton said.

"It won't be long now," Barbara said.

Fenton brooded a moment. A startled look came into his eyes.

"Good Heavens!" he said. "Supposing your husband were to discover our plan at the last moment, as the result of this dallying? Do you realise that he is a desperate man?"

"You needn't worry about Neville," Barbara said. "He knows very well that we love one another, but he would never suspect us of planning to elope. Even if I told him, he still wouldn't believe it. He doesn't think you are that sort of man and he thinks I'm far too shrewd to throw in my lot with you under these circumstances."

"That sort of man?" Fenton said in a hurt tone. "What do you mean by that?"

Barbara ignored the question.

"Neville is far more subtle than most people think," she said.

Fenton leaned against the back of the sofa and let his head droop. He now looked exhausted after his recent passionate outburst.

"I know he is subtle," he said gloomily. "I also know he is merciless and entirely without scruple. How can you be sure that he won't act against us suddenly, when we least expect it?"

"When a woman has lived for three years with a man she hates," Barbara said, "she gets to know him thoroughly. If love is blind, then hatred has a thousand eyes. At this moment, he is fighting for his life and he knows it. You and I are not the enemies he is fighting. His enemy is Michael O'Dwyer. Therefore, we don't have to be in the least concerned with him, unless he should suddenly dispose of O'Dwyer, a most unlikely event because of the Fenian's shrewdness. Neville is like our English bulldog. When he gets his teeth in an enemy, he is indifferent to everything else."

Fenton sat forward, put his hands on his knees and said with force:

"How I hate this senseless disorder! You mention the savagery of the bull dog. That's exactly what it is, savagery. Everything

noble and refined is condemned. The most base instincts in man are glorified, under the names of courage and determination. The other day in court, when they sentenced St. George to a term of imprisonment, I realised this for the first time. The prisoner was one of the most dignified men it has ever been my privilege to see. There was no mistaking the nobility of his countenance. Yet he was jailed as a menace to the realm. How could such a man be a menace, unless the realm has become corrupt and unjust? He is a menace, perhaps, to something that is about to fall because of its corruption. He could only be an ornament and a source of added power in a realm based on a secure foundation of justice. The magistrate offered a most striking contrast. He was a brutish lout, one of those illiterate drunkards that disgrace our provincial courts. He blundered several times while passing sentence, obviously being ill at ease in St. George's presence. Even such a degraded man was unable to condemn a superior without feeling shame. By Jove! It's a horrible experience to find that the gods one worshipped have feet of clay."

"May I ask you to remove my boots?" Barbara said. "They are becoming very uncomfortable."

"Pardon me," Fenton said.

He crouched on the hearth rug at once and began to tug at the left boot.

"I couldn't dream of going away without settling my score with Neville," Barbara said. "I definitely have a crow to pluck with him. Three years of boredom and humiliation! Apart from any practical consideration, I insist on getting paid in full for those three frightful years."

Fenton looked up at her suddenly, holding in his hands the left boot he had just removed.

"What do you mean?" he said suspiciously.

Barbara smiled. Then she looked into the fire.

"I'm a very practical person," she said. "Most women are practical when they are in love."

Fenton pulled off the other boot and said:

"Is that why you are delaying? Just to settle your score?"

Barbara wriggled her released feet as she said:

"You told me you have hardly any money, Jim."

Fenton stood erect, holding the two boots in his right hand by their straps.

"I'm not altogether penniless," he said, blushing deeply. "I can scrape together, all told, some hundreds of guineas, at least enough to take us across the ocean. In America . . ."

"I have nothing but the clothes on my back," Barbara said,

"together with a few jewels that would not be very marketable in case of necessity. My first husband and myself were always pawning things, or trying to raise money on doubtful securities. I know how unromantic it is to live from hand to mouth. For that reason, I'm determined not to go away empty-handed."

Fenton drew himself to his full height and leaned forward slightly from the hips.

"Out with it, Barbara," he whispered. "What do you intend doing?"

A faint smile appeared at the corners of Barbara's mouth, making her face look cruel and masculine. She opened the three top buttons of her tunic as she began to speak.

"For some time now," she said, "he has been tortured by the suspicion that he is not going to be the victor in his struggle with O'Dwyer. I first saw it in his eyes the night after he had paid a visit with you to the tavern-keeper that afterwards hanged himself. His eyes looked afraid. I was surprised. Until then I thought that nothing could make him afraid. Of course, he had been going about in armour for a year, accompanied by a bodyguard of servants and by his Cuban bloodhound. All that was merely a reasonable precaution, taken to ensure safety. Only fools refuse to take reasonable precautions. Now, however, I saw that he had an Achilles' heel. It was very disappointing. Even though I hated him with my whole heart, I had admired his brute courage until then. There is nothing contradictory in that, you know. On the other hand, it was humiliating to find myself at the beck and call of a man that feared shadows, just like one of the superstitious peasants he despises so much. I had made the mistake that women invariably make when estimating a man's courage. They only value those qualities that they lack themselves, steady nerves, strength and endurance. They ignore intellect, which is the true seat of human courage, as distinct from that of the lower animals. Lacking sufficient imagination to cope with the odd and entirely new way in which he was being attacked, Neville went into a panic. He even suspected that black magic was being used against him. 'Those damned Irish,' he said, 'are sold to the Devil, all of them.' He was pathetic when he came home after failing to evict those peasants that live on the Killuragh mountains. He was just like a dog that has been whipped. I asked him why his face was bandaged. He mumbled something under his breath, being ashamed to admit that he had lost his head and got into a brawl with one of your constables. After that, he got worse from day to day. He lost his temper with the servants over the merest trifle and beat them terribly, women as well as men.

He even took to beating his favourite horse, Blazer. That was the most tell-tale sign of all, because I had never before seen him lose his temper with a dumb animal. He was always most gentle with horses. It was his awful behaviour that made the servants desert at once, when ordered to leave by the Fenians. Nobody could possibly be loyal to a master of that sort, or consent to make sacrifices for him. Even poor Stapleton bolted. The timid little soul went on his knees to me before he went and kissed my hands, with tears running down his cheeks. He was so frightened. Then he drove off with Hopkins at full gallop in the gig, which was afterwards found abandoned outside the railway station at Clash. All this happened during the afternoon, while Neville was having a nap. He had been unable to sleep at all at night since the trouble started. He raved like a madman when he discovered the servants had gone. Then he rushed to the bloodhound's kennel. I heard a cry of horror. Then there was silence. Presently I saw him come into the drawing-room with the dead body of the uncouth beast in his arms. A chain that was attached to the dog's neck trailed along the ground. The legs were already stiff and the stomach was swollen. It had obviously been poisoned by one of the runaway servants. Neville sat down with the disgusting beast in his arms. He seemed dumbfounded by its loss. It was some time before I could persuade him to take it out into the orchard and bury it. That was a frightful night. Neville roamed about the place, discharging his pistol at every sound. There were certainly weird sounds, like the wailing of the banshee. I dare say it was some Fenian trying to frighten us. At the moment, however, I fully believed it was a banshee. Everybody becomes a prey to superstitious fears at a time like that. The groom came back in the morning while we were having breakfast. He marched into the dining-room, dead drunk and with his clothes in a filthy condition. He stood to attention and shouted at Neville, like a soldier reporting to his commanding officer: 'Andrew Fitzgerald returning to duty, sir.' Later on in the day the Constabulary came, as you know. We have been living since then like people besieged by Red Indians, in one of Fenimore Cooper's frontier outposts. The few servants that the Constabulary managed to procure in the neighbouring towns proved to be worthless creatures of the criminal class. We had to send them away again. They could neither cook nor do any housework. All they would do was drink whisky from morning till night. Now I do whatever is absolutely necessary myself. The groom gives me a hand in his rare sober moments. Oddly enough, Neville's spirits have improved during the past week. He has again begun to boast of

delivering the death blow to O'Dwyer. At the same time, he has become so cautious that I began to despair of getting an opportunity to visit you. He would hardly leave the house, even under heavy guard. Then he suddenly decided, out of the blue, to go to Galway this afternoon. I'm not sure, but I think he has gone to hire somebody for the death blow. A spy or an assassin of some sort. He seemed to be in high spirits on his departure. He had the hunter's gleam in his eyes that I used to see so often in the old days."

She suddenly turned towards Fenton, smiled broadly and added:

"I've not been idle, though, while I was waiting. I discovered where the money is hidden and I've worked out our plan of escape in detail."

Fenton had stood stock still while she spoke, with the jack boots clutched in his right hand. He started and turned pale as she uttered the word money.

"To what money do you refer?" he said after a short pause.

"He always kept a certain sum in gold with him," Barbara said, "even before this trouble began. He is one of those people, still common in the rural parts of England, who don't quite trust the banks. Lately he has been adding freely to this hoard. Now, I am pleased to say, it amounts to more than four thousand sovereigns. Can you imagine? It's quite a little fortune. It was on the night we were alone in the house that I discovered the hiding place, which is very cunningly devised in the ceiling above his bed. He went up to his room after burying the hound. After a little while I heard the wailing that I told you about already and got terribly nervous. So I went upstairs to look for Neville. I heard peculiar noises as I came along the corridor. He had apparently upset the iron box after taking it out of the hole and a number of the sovereigns fell, making a great clatter as they rolled about the floor. I knew at once what he was doing, because I had been trying for some time to discover the hiding place. I sneaked up to the door and managed to peep into the room without being discovered. In his distraught condition he had forgotten to lock the door."

Fenton stared at her in silence for a long time after she had finished speaking. Barbara returned his stare. Although the smile of triumph still played about the corners of her mouth, there were now vertical lines in her forehead and her eyes had narrowed as if in anger.

She touched the sofa beside her with her palm.

"Sit down, Jim," she said softly.

Fenton sighed and walked slowly across the floor towards the cupboard that stood in the corner between the window and the door. He dropped the boots casually to the floor on the way across. He opened the cupboard and took out his whisky bottle.

"What are you doing, Jim?" Barbara said, getting to her feet.

Fenton uncorked the bottle and said:

"I should have known."

"What should you have known?" Barbara said in an anxious tone.

Fenton took a tumbler from the cupboard and poured whisky into it. When the tumbler was more than half full, he put the bottle down slowly.

"This is my first drink since that day," he said.

He put the tumbler to his lips and drank until it was empty. Then he poured more whisky from the bottle.

"What should you have known?" Barbara repeated as she undid the remaining buttons of her tunic. "I insist on your telling me."

Fenton took his glass and came towards her. He halted when he was halfway. He clicked his heels and tried to stand erect. The whisky had apparently gone to his head at once. He swayed back and forth.

"I should have known," he said slowly, "that a man does not become ennobled by dishonour."

Barbara took off her tunic hurriedly and threw it on the sofa. She began to undo her blouse.

"Quite the contrary is true," Fenton said, raising his voice. "Dishonour leaves a stain that can never be washed out. After the first step in the wrong direction, it is impossible to regain lost honour. It seems that there is no turning back, once that first step has been taken. One must go on from one infamy to another. One makes excuses and one tries to justify oneself, but it is an illusion and a sham. That day I was full of illusions. I walked among the stars. Now reality comes to uncover the falsehood of my pretenses. I used to think that it was in your husband's room I took the first step, when he proposed to make me his accomplice in a murder that he planned. The truth is that I had taken the first step a long time before that. I took it when I first surrendered in thought to my love for you."

He threw back his head and cried out in an agonised voice:

"What do you want me to do? Did you come here because you want my help to steal that money, just as Neville needed the documents I had?"

"That is not true," Barbara said as she took off her blouse. "I

came here because I want to give proof of my love. I'm going to give you proof, Jim, full proof."

"You lie," Fenton said. "I know now why the groom became a drunkard and why he returned. You ruined him, too. Perhaps even Neville . . ."

He interrupted himself as she threw the blouse to the floor and stretched out of her arms towards him. A flimsy silk chemise, frilled with black lace, was all that now screened the tawny beauty of her virgin breasts. He threw away his glass and rushed to her.

"My love! My darling love!" he muttered hoarsely.

"It is you I want, Jim," Barbara cried exultantly as they sank to the sofa in one another's arms. "You and you only. I'll give you proof of my love."

Made faint by the intensity of his passion, he laid his cheek against her bosom and closed his eyes.

"I'll make you forget all of this unhappiness," she said tenderly as she stroked his hair. "Be calm and don't worry any more. Later, you will realise how paltry these things are. A happy man has no conscience, Jim, and I'm going to make you very happy. I promise you that. I have everything planned. You have nothing to do but ride with me to Galway when I give the signal. We are going to Texas on an American ship. Then we'll take horses and ride out on to the plains, as free as birds. Our life is going to be wild and free and beautiful. It's going to be a dance of love."

Even though Fenton still knew that he was doomed, he listened in rapture to her wanton whispering.

CHAPTER XXXI

ELIZABETH WAS IN BED, recovering from a heavy cold she had caught while collecting used clothes in the village for the Relief Committee. Wearing a thick woollen jacket and with a knitted scarf wound several times around her throat, she sat propped up against pillows. Her little thin face, framed by a tasselled white night-bonnet, looked excited in spite of her depressing ailment. The collected clothes, all washed and ironed by now, lay neatly piled on a table by the side of the bed. She was mending the last of the garments.

Lettice came into the room just as the big clock in the hall downstairs began to strike the hour. She was closely followed by Tim Ahearn, who carried a large wicker basket.

"Good heavens! Lettice," Elizabeth cried in surprise, "it's noon already. I had no idea it was that late."

"Put it down here, Tim," Lettice said.

Ahearn laid the basket on the floor beside the table. Then he looked at Elizabeth reproachfully.

"I've had the horse harnessed for the last half-hour," he said, "waiting to take those old rags to Clash for you."

"What impertinence!" cried Elizabeth indignantly. "Old rags, indeed! It's outrageous. You've become insufferable since my brother went to jail."

"I never thought I'd live to see the day, Miss Elizabeth," Ahearn said mournfully, "when you'd be gathering old clothes in the village like any poor wandering rag-man."

"You idiot!" cried Elizabeth. "You utterly stupid man! Don't you understand that these clothes are for needy victims of the struggle against the landlords? Now that winter has come, the people on the Relief Committee are clamouring for supplies, to be distributed at once."

"Don't excite yourself," Lettice said to her aunt.

She turned to Ahearn and added:

"I'll call you when the hamper is ready, Tim."

Ahearn halted as he was going out the door and looked back over his shoulder at Elizabeth.

"It's little thanks you'll get," he said to her, "from these people that are pretending to be needy. They'll just laugh at you up their sleeves. More than likely, they'll pawn whatever is given to them and drink the price."

"Oh! That frightful man!" cried Elizabeth after the door had closed behind Ahearn. "He's furious at being kept waiting. He's in a hurry to get drunk at Clash. Since Raoul went away, he has reverted to all his bad habits."

"Poor Tim!" Lettice said as she began to pack the clothes into the basket. "My father has been too hard on him."

"Next thing you know," Elizabeth added, "he'll move back into the settle-bed from the attic. He keeps complaining about having to sleep in a clean bed."

"One must understand," Lettice said, "that his periodic tipples are the only exciting moments in his life. He's really not a drunkard. One small measure of rum intoxicates him. He told me that he drinks when his loneliness becomes too much for him to bear. 'The loneliness of the great world,' he called it. He has a

beautiful soul. It would be very difficult to find a man with a finer conception of loyalty."

Elizabeth was shamefaced as she continued her mending.

"Forgive me," she said in a contrite tone. "I'm far too intolerant of other people's faults. Even though I've learned from you how to love the people in general, I'm still too selfish to love them individually."

"You are being very unjust to yourself, dear Aunt," Lettice said with feeling. "The truth is that you have spent your whole life working devotedly for others, without reward of any sort."

"That's not so," Elizabeth said. "Whatever I did was through a sense of duty. That's not enough. It breeds self-righteousness. Only what comes straight from the heart is really beautiful. That is why great sinners are often so lovable. Whatever they do, whether good or evil, comes right from their hearts."

Tears came into her eyes and she looked at Lettice tenderly.

"Oh! I'm so grateful to you," she continued, "for all you have given me, since you came into the house. God grant I may be able to repay you for your great bounty."

Lettice came over to the bed and laid her hand gently against her aunt's forehead.

"Try to compose yourself now," she whispered. "I shouldn't have let you do all that mending."

Elizabeth took her niece's hand and pressed it to her lips. Tears were rolling down her thin cheeks.

"You are an angel of love," she whispered.

"Hush!" Lettice said. "Be quiet for a little while. I'll finish mending that jacket."

Like a child that fears a toy is going to be taken from it, Elizabeth clutched the jacket and her sewing needle.

"No, no," she cried. "Let me finish it. I want to do it myself. I insist. There are only a few more stitches. Then I'll be quiet. I promise you."

"Very well," Lettice said, returning to the basket.

Although it was very cold outside, with a blustering wind, a blazing turf fire in the grate made the room cosy and bright. Now and again, the naked tops of four young trees came into view beyond the window, as they bowed down slowly before the rush of the wind. Heavy waves crashed on to the beach at regular intervals. Seagulls cackled in harsh chorus as they soared over the house.

"There now," Elizabeth said after a long silence, as she put down the mended jacket. "I've finished."

Lettice continued to pack the clothes without seeming to

have heard her aunt's remarks. Her face looked very stern. "Did I hear somebody come riding up the drive a little while ago?" said Elizabeth after another silence.

Lettice raised her head slowly and looked out the window.

"Father Costigan called," she said solemnly.

"The cheek of him!" said Elizabeth angrily. "He must be entirely devoid of all decent feeling. Otherwise he would never dream of coming here, after what he did to Raoul."

Lettice put the last of the clothes into the basket, fastened the lid and went out on to the landing to call Ahearn.

"You may come up now, Tim," she said. "Ask Annie to come with you. The hamper is rather heavy."

Then she went to the window and looked out over the sea. The foam-capped waves rolled on and on before the wind, in endless march. On the far horizon a black cloud hung low above the water. Rain was falling out there.

"What did Father Cornelius want?" Elizabeth said.

"He came to talk about Michael," Lettice said.

The two servants entered. Elizabeth gave Ahearn instructions about delivering the hamper of clothes. This time he curtsied to her respectfully without speaking. Then the two of them picked up the basket and walked out of the room on tip-toe.

"Did he have any news?" Elizabeth said eagerly as the servants began to descend the stairs.

"Not of Michael," Lettice said, turning away from the window.

"Oh! How I wish I could take your sorrow from you!" Elizabeth cried with fervour as Lettice walked slowly towards the fireplace. "It is unjust that one so deserving of happiness as you are should be . . ."

Lettice halted suddenly by the foot of the bed, thrust out her chin haughtily and said:

"Thank you for your kind intention, dear Aunt, but I assure you that I feel no sorrow."

Elizabeth looked very hurt.

"Upon my word!" she said. "Sometimes you behave and speak exactly like your father."

"Forgive me," Lettice said as she moved again towards the fireplace.

Her carriage had lost its girlish exuberance. It now had the solemn dignity of mature womanhood.

"You'd be the most heartless of all creatures," Elizabeth continued in a passionate tone, "if you didn't feel sorrow when your husband is being hunted night and day like a wild animal."

Lettice sat on a low stool by the fire and clasped her hands

over her knees. Her hair looked dark red against the pale flames that rose from the burning turf.

"I suffer, but I feel no sorrow," she said.

"What is the difference?" said Elizabeth. "What is the use of splitting hairs like that?"

"One feels sorrow when something is lost," Lettice said, "or because of a pain that one bears against one's will."

"I insist that you are splitting hairs," said Elizabeth. "I find that foolish and utterly useless. It would do you more good to pour ashes on your head and wail for all the world to hear your woe, like the wise women of the people do."

"Why should I grieve for him?" Lettice said. "He is now living in the way he wants to live. He finds beauty only in danger. I suffer because I'm parted from him. That is all."

Elizabeth leaned forward and stared intently at her niece for a little while. She had ceased to be irritated. Her eyes again looked tender.

"So you have heard nothing from him yet," she said at length.

"No," said Lettice.

"Not a single word since he went away that afternoon," Elizabeth said.

"I didn't expect to hear from him," Lettice said calmly.

"How cruel men are!" said Elizabeth.

"He is not being cruel," said Lettice. "It's just that we had already said farewell."

"What do you mean?" said Elizabeth.

"It was after the storm," said Lettice.

Elizabeth leaned back slowly against the pillows and said:

"Tell me about it, child."

"It was on the fifth day of our honeymoon," Lettice said gently, as she stared into the fire. "We had been wonderfully happy for four days on the tiny island to which he brought me in a *pucaun*. It was a naked rock, sitting alone on the sea, many miles from any other land. There were only thousands of large white birds, a strip of sand on which we beached our boat and a thatched hut once used by smugglers. The hut was perched on the very summit of the island, two hundred feet above the water. Michael's comrades had repaired it for our visit. It was Indian summer for the first four days. Michael told me that the island fishermen call it 'blue weather' and that it was held sacred in ancient times to Ængus, the God of Love. Until quite recently, he said, mystical rites were performed in secret during 'blue weather' at many places along the coast. It's not at all strange that people should worship such beauty. It truly had a divine

quality. Everything was coloured an enchanting blue. The sea was transparent down to the very bed of the ocean. Each morning at sunrise, when we swam out side by side through the smooth blue water, we sang for joy. In the evenings, we sat outside our hut and built castles in the air, even though we already knew what the future held in store for our love. It was easy to forget and to make believe up there beneath the purple vault of Heaven and its myriad stars. On the morning of the fifth day, we rose to find that the 'blue weather' had vanished in the night. The sky had turned grey. There was a light breeze. Michael stood watching the sea for a long time in silence. He had been very gay, like a little boy on holiday, since our arrival at the island. Now his face was stark, as it had been when I saw him first, staggering into the kitchen. Dark balls of cloud appeared on the horizon, like puffs of smoke from guns that have just been fired. He turned to me and took my hands and stared at me steadily, without smiling or speaking. He kept pressing my hands. His own hands trembled. Finally he suggested that we go sailing. I was surprised and said to him: 'Surely, it looks as if a storm were coming.' He smiled and said: 'Would you be afraid to sail with me through a storm?' I told him that I would not be afraid. He then became excited and kissed me several times. 'I have a reason for asking you to sail with me,' he said. 'I'll tell you what it is afterwards.' So we put the boat into the sea and hoisted the sail. When we cleared the mouth of the little cove, he gave full scope to the sail and we raced before the wind, which was already blowing strongly. The *pucaun* began to leap the rising waves like a hare going through long grass. We sailed ahead for more than an hour. By then it blew a hurricane. The waves came towering after us, always threatening to smother us and yet missing us by a hair's breadth. Then Michael shouted into my ear: 'We are now going to fight the storm.' He lashed me to the stern and we raced on for a little while longer. He suddenly put about. I felt certain that we had foundered, because a giant wave passed right over me. I was nearly carried overboard, in spite of the stout rope with which I was tied. I lay breathless and unable to see for several minutes. When I recovered, however, I saw that we were still on an even keel, with our bow into the teeth of the wind. Michael grinned at me and we clasped hands. At once I felt a greater joy than I had ever known before. He had opened the innermost door and allowed me to enter. Then I understood what he had really meant when he said that Cape Horn was beautiful. I understood why beauty could be found in danger and why rapture could be dark as well as bright. We fought the

hurricane for six hours, trying to push our tiny craft ahead in spite of the savage power pitted against it. During every moment of that time we treaded the brink of death. He gave me the tiller to hold several times, for a few moments, while he looked to the sail. That was very beautiful. Towards sunset, the hurricane had spent itself, but there was still a heavy sea. We couldn't return to our island, so we made for Grealish. We were entering the roadstead when he took me in his arms and whispered: 'Later on, when it's time for me to go, remember that we have said farewell. This is our farewell. Promise me now that there will be no other.' I promised him."

Elizabeth was sobbing aloud when her niece finished speaking.

"Oh! My child!" she murmured. "My gentle child! If I could only take this sorrow from you! Oh! The cruelty and stupidity of men!"

"Father Cornelius asked me to take Michael a message," Lettice said. "I'm trying to decide whether I have enough courage to deliver it without again . . ."

She was interrupted by the sound of heavy footsteps mounting the stairs. Her face brightened at once.

"That's Father Francis," she cried, jumping to her feet. "He has come back at the right moment. Oh! How wonderful!"

She ran to the door and threw it open. She saw Father Francis mopping his forehead as he came on to the landing. With a cry of joy, she went to the priest and threw her arms around him.

"I'm so glad you came, Father Francis," she cried. "I need you terribly just now."

"I heard that Elizabeth is sick," Father Francis whispered.

Still mopping the perspiration from his haggard face with a big red handkerchief, he hurried to Elizabeth's bed. He wore a dark frieze overcoat that reached almost to the floor. Lettice walked with him, holding his left arm with both hands.

"Dear Father Francis!" Elizabeth said, with tears rolling down her cheeks. "How good of you to come at this moment!"

Father Francis took her outstretched hands and said:

"Hearing you were sick, I thought you might need me, now that Raoul and Michael are both gone."

"We both need you terribly," Lettice said with deep emotion. "Allow me to take your coat."

"It was last night I heard you were sick," he said to Elizabeth, as Lettice removed his coat. "It was up in the mountains I heard it, at a village fifteen miles from here. I have been walking since before dawn."

"You poor man!" Elizabeth said. "Sit down on this chair here beside me. Lettice will get you food and drink."

"I'll get some at once," Lettice said, moving away with the coat.

"I'm so excited," Father Francis said, "by what I have seen and heard, that I feel neither hunger nor weariness nor thirst."

Lettice paused as she crossed the floor. She looked back at the priest over her shoulder. Elizabeth also looked at him intently. Since his appearance, they had been prattling like excited children. Now they became sombre again, as they had been during the tragic communion he interrupted.

"A miracle has happened," Father Francis said. "The people are standing fast again after their panic. I've tramped every inch of the whole district during the past three weeks, back and forth the whole time. Everywhere I found them again brave after their panic."

He paused and looked from one to the other of the two women. His face had become exalted.

"I felt certain that all was lost," he said, "on the terrible day Raoul got arrested. There didn't seem to be any hope for people so degraded. Oh! They were base that day. They behaved terribly. Yet they are now standing fast. They remain loyal and obedient to the Fenians, in spite of all inducements. They share all they have with our brave fighting men. Nor is it through fear of punishment they do so. Not any more. There is a new light in their eyes now, the poor creatures. It's a light that will never again be quenched until they are free men."

Neither Lettice nor Elizabeth spoke. They both now looked at the floor sombrely.

"The fight against Butcher is nearing its end," the priest continued, lowering his voice. "I heard things on my way here, strange news that convinces me of that wicked man's approaching doom."

Both Lettice and Elizabeth raised their heads and looked at him eagerly.

"It was at the village of Bothar Liath I heard the news," Father Francis continued, "while I was resting there for a spell on my way here. A woman came to the house where I was and asked me, for the love of God, to comfort her nephew. 'He's Andrew Fitzgerald,' she said, 'the groom that was in service to Captain Butcher. He has run away from Manister House and he is in a terrible state. From the way he's acting and talking, I'm afraid he'll do himself harm.' So I went with her to see the groom. I heard him shouting and using terrible language as I

approached the house. On seeing me, though, he got quiet. He told me his story gently, just as if it were his confession. Indeed, part of his strange tale concerns only himself and God, so I'll not mention it. The other part alone is our concern. He told me that Butcher's wife eloped with District Inspector Fenton three nights ago. They took a large sum of money with them, several thousands sovereigns, belonging to Captain Butcher."

"Good gracious!" said Elizabeth. "How extraordinary!"

"Butcher is overwhelmed, the groom said," continued the priest. "When such things happen the end is near."

"Where are they gone?" said Elizabeth. "Does anybody know?"

"To America," said Father Francis. "She sent back her grey stallion from Galway by messenger. The man carried a note for her husband, telling all that had happened. There's a callous woman for you. When Butcher read it, he fell down in a heap. The note dropped to the floor. The groom picked it up and read it. Then he ran out of the house like a madman, up the mountains to the place where I found him."

Lettice hurried back to him, clutched his arm and looked up into his face.

"You really think the end is near?" she said anxiously. "Why do you think so?"

The priest looked at her solemnly and said:

"When the green of the forest is bent and the withered is torn, death marches past."

"Take me to Michael," Lettice whispered urgently.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE CAVE WAS SHAPED LIKE A KITE. It was thirty feet wide and twenty feet high at the entrance. Then it narrowed rapidly and the roof dropped as it penetrated the bowels of the cliff to a depth of one hundred and ten feet. Towards the far end, a man had to crawl on his hands and knees in order to advance. Both the floor and the roof were dry. A thick bed of heather, over which blankets were strewn, lay against the right wall. On the left there was a small forge, used for casting bullets and making repairs on firearms. A number of sacks, containing rifle ammunition and dynamite, were stacked against the front wall to the right of the entrance hole. A crude table of white pine stood to the

left of the hole. The sea was visible in the far distance. The horizon was still red at the point where the sun had just disappeared. The sound of the waves, dashing against the base of the cliff, two hundred and fifty feet below, was deep and awe-inspiring. The air was very cold.

Michael was sitting at the table, going over the plan of the night's operation for the last time, when a sentry marched into the cave.

"Your wife is up on top with Father Kelly," the man said. "She wishes to see you."

Michael glanced at the man sharply. He showed no emotion.

"Tell her to wait a little while," he said. "I'll send for her presently."

He watched the sentry leave the cave. Then he lowered his eyes once more to the rough map that was chalked on the surface of the table.

"The important thing," he said, "is to keep the enemy from interfering with our work. For that reason, Kilroy and Lynch have the chief tasks in the night's work."

He began to mark points on the map with a piece of chalk.

"Kilroy's men will block the Clash road at this point," he continued, "in order to keep the enemy forces bottled up in the town. Lynch's men will encircle Manister House over here and keep it under fire, in order to pin down the enemy detachment stationed there. Flatley and his men will destroy all these buildings marked here, together with all fuel, fodder and other stores they may find, using dynamite for whatever won't burn readily. Roche, Deering, Muldoon and Coyne will proceed with their detachments along these routes marked here and drive the cattle to this bridge, where I'll be waiting. Has any man got a question to ask? Is everything absolutely clear?"

The eight men had been leaning forward in a compact group about him, peering intently at the map. Now they all stood erect. They looked shapeless and huge, owing to the great number of thick frieze garments they wore. Even so, they blew on their palms, slapped their arm-pits and stamped their feet because of the intense cold. Nobody spoke.

"Very well," Michael said, as he drew a piece of sacking back and forth over the chalked map. "We must have gone over this plan a thousand times during the past three days. There is nothing further I can do for you. Just keep cool and obey orders to the letter. Be on your way, lads. Good luck to you. Be careful with those sacks going up the cliff."

As the men began to pick up the sacks of ammunition and

throw them across their backs, Michael got to his feet and called Anthony Cooney. The young schoolmaster came over to him.

"Wait here a little while, Anthony," Michael said. "I want to have a last word with you."

The other men said good-bye casually to their commander as they went out, stooping under the weight of the sacks. They turned sharply to the right after going through the hole. A narrow ledge stretched along the cliff's face to the path that led upwards to the summit.

When they were alone, Michael put his hands on Cooney's shoulders.

"Are you certain now that you're strong enough for the job you've undertaken?" he said.

Cooney was a slightly built man of twenty-six, with coal black hair, rosy cheeks and merry blue eyes. His nose and mouth were most delicately shaped. Indeed, his whole face was endowed with great beauty. He looked gay, weak and irresponsible. He blushed with annoyance at Michael's question.

"Why do you keep at me, Michael?" he said in a musical voice. "Is it how you think I'm a coward?"

"They are going to do terrible things to you, Anthony," Michael said.

"Let them do their best," Cooney said arrogantly. "Maybe they'll get the surprise of their lives."

"You have no idea of the terrible things they are going to do to you," Michael said.

Cooney got angry. His eyes blazed and his upper lip twitched.

"Is it how you are trying to frighten me instead of giving me courage?" he said bitterly.

Michael pressed his shoulders affectionately.

"I want to harden you," he said gently, "by making you suffer beforehand. That's why I have kept talking to you for the past three days, about the awful things they are going to do to you and about the danger of your turning coward. I wanted you to suffer so much beforehand that the real trial would be easy to bear. You'll be so prepared for it in your mind that it won't feel half as bad as you thought it would."

Cooney's handsome face became radiant. Tears of pride came into his eyes.

"I won't fail you, Michael," he cried with passionate earnestness. "I swear before Almighty God that I won't fail you."

Michael clasped the young man's hand and said:

"I have confidence in you, Anthony. Go now. Tell my wife to come down alone."

With a gay wave of his arm, Cooney ran out of the cave. He began to sing as he went along the ledge.

"I knew she would come," Michael said aloud as he stared at the sea through the entrance hole. "I wanted her to come, even though I had already said farewell."

A schooner was bearing towards the south, with all her white sails bellied full, across the spot where the sun had set. The red glow had now vanished. It was getting dusk.

Michael started when he heard the sentry's voice guiding her along the ledge. He began to tremble. Then she appeared at the entrance and the sentry went away. She came forward into the cave until she saw him. Then she halted, with her hands by her sides and her feet close together, like a timid little girl. She was dressed in a red frieze skirt and a black jacket of rough flannel. A grey woollen shawl cowed her head.

"How are you, Michael?" she said in a low voice.

Michael tried to speak and failed. Then he came forward and took her hand. They remained silent, standing close together with their hands clasped. Although they smiled with their lips, there was anguish in their eyes.

"Father Costigan asked me to give you a message," she said at length.

"What is it?" he whispered.

"He wants you to stop fighting and obey the Committee," she said, speaking very rapidly. "He said the people want peace and that, if blood is spilt by you, it's the innocent who will suffer. He said the Catholic clergy have now taken command of the Land League all over Ireland and that they have won the people of substance over to their side. A continuation of violence, by even a small group, would prejudice their chances of gaining land reforms from the English. He said that the Fenians, in every district except this, have obeyed Michael Davitt and renounced militant action of an illegal character. He said that you would be shortly outlawed by your own Fenian organization if you persisted in your present conduct. Finally, he offered to procure a safe passage out of the country for you and your men, if you . . ."

Michael dropped her hand and said sharply:

"That's enough."

He moved back into the cave two paces and then stood with his back to her.

"Forgive me, Michael," Lettice said, "but I promised him that I would deliver the message."

"I'm glad you came," Michael said. "I'm terribly glad."

"There is another thing I want to tell you," Lettice whispered.

"Tell me what it is," Michael said.

"I'm going to have a baby," she said softly.

He turned at once and rushed to her.

"Oh! My darling!" Lettice said as he took her in his arms.

After a transport of tenderness, he took her face between his hands and said:

"There is no farewell to such a love as ours."

"No, Michael," Lettice said.

"I hope it is a son," he said.

"I'm certain of it," she answered.

"If it is," Michael said, "I want him to be called Raoul Francis."

"That will be his name," Lettice said.

"Raoul and Francis must teach him," Michael said.

"That will be very beautiful," Lettice said.

"Then he will be well equipped," Michael said, "when his time comes to travel my road."

Even though they were so close together, their faces had now become indistinct in the quickly falling gloom of night.

"It's time for you to go, Lettice," he whispered.

They embraced once more. Then he shouted to the sentry and walked with her out of the cave.

"Be very careful with her now, Matt," he said in a detached tone as the sentry came along the ledge towards them. "Go slowly up the path."

"Have no fear," the sentry said. "I'll be careful with her."

Lettice did not look at him again. When she had passed out of sight, he shuddered. Then he walked stiff-legged to the brink of the cliff and looked down into the sea. All was darkness there.

He covered his face with his hands and stood motionless, listening to the never-ending lament that rose from the hidden water.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE WIND BLEW FIERCELY THROUGH the broad arch of the stone bridge beneath which the old woman had taken shelter for the night. She had thrown up a wall of loose stones about herself. It made a semicircle against the side of the arch. There was only room for a fire and the wooden box on which she sat within the tiny enclosure. She had to crouch in order to keep her head out of the wind.

Her milch goat and her ass were tethered to the lee of the wall. The ass had his snout to the ground and he leaned far over to the right, trying to get his scarred back under cover. The white goat chewed her cud. She had a cosy place to lie under the ass's belly. A little cart stood on end, with its red spokes in the air, by the mouth of the arch.

The old woman was telling her rosary beads as she crouched before the fire. A round black cap was perched like a coronet on top of her snow-white hair, that hung down straight on either side of her gaunt face. The rest of her body was clothed in shapeless rags, held together at the waist by a piece of rope. While her lips moved in prayer, her eyes were fixed hungrily on a tiny skillet that stood on the smooth stone round which the fire was built. She was cooking porridge in the skillet.

She put her beads hurriedly into the pocket of her outer skirt when the oatmeal began to simmer. Then she rummaged inside the box on which she sat. She brought out a short, thin stick.

"Musha, it took you a long time to get warm," she said in a scolding tone as she began to stir the porridge with energy. "Boil up now, you rogue. You have kept me waiting nearly half the night for my supper."

A deep and narrow stream flowed without sound beneath the centre of the bridge. The water there was pitch black. Some distance further down its course, however, it shimmered in the moonlight and made gay music as it tumbled over the uneven face of a steep ledge.

The sound of many horses trotting came from the west. The old woman turned her head to one side and listened. The goat stopped chewing her cud, thrust her ears forward sharply and bleated on a low note.

"Be quiet there, Sheila," the old woman said.

She half rose, put her hands on her knees and peered over the top of the wall towards the west. The road was flat and straight for nearly half a mile. It looked white in the moonlight. It was bound by a ragged stone fence that had completely fallen to the ground in many places. The land on either side was barren. An oak forest had once stood there. All the trees died owing to the earth getting washed away. Now the withered stumps and the matted roots lay naked above the bed rock. They were like an army of giant grey crabs squatting on the black earth in the ghostly light of the moon. Farther west, the land rose abruptly towards the sea. The road turned to the right past a rocky bluff.

Six horsemen, riding three abreast, came into view from

behind the bluff. They had rifles slung across their backs. With their heads bent low for shelter from the wind, they trotted swiftly towards the bridge through the dead forest.

The old woman sat down as they approached. She began again to stir her porridge.

"Be quiet there now, Sheila," she scolded, after the goat had bleated a second time. "Don't let me hear another sound out of you, for fear these men might notice us. They could be bad men that would do us harm."

She listened anxiously as the horsemen halted on the bridge overhead. There was a short silence. Then she heard two horses gallop towards the north along the Killuragh road. A little while later, two men trudged down along the rough path that led from the road. They came into sight before the mouth of the arch.

The goat snorted and rapped the ground fiercely with her left fore-foot.

"Behave yourself, Sheila," the old woman said. "Have manners in front of strangers."

The white goat trotted out a little way towards the advancing men. She had her short tail flat against her back. She snorted belligerently. When they came near her, however, she retreated hurriedly to her former position beneath the ass's belly. There she stood watching them, timid and silent, with her delicate nostrils quivering.

The two men had their faces masked by black kerchiefs. The man in front advanced with his rifle at the high port. The other man had an unlighted torch in his right hand.

"Stand up there," said the man in front, as he halted before the old woman's little wall and levelled his rifle. "Let us have a good look at you."

She stood erect promptly. Although she was sixty-five years old, her movements were quick and vigorous. The top of the wall reached just above the waist of her tall, lean frame.

"Who are you?" the man said, after peering closely at her.

"I'm Nora Crane of Ballymore," she said proudly. "Who might you be?"

"We're Fenians," the man said.

The other man lit the torch at the fire and held it up before the old woman's face.

"It's Nora Crane all right," he said at once.

Her withered cheeks looked rosy in the torch-light. She had big, strong bones. Her jaws were square. There was a look of madness in her sunken, blue eyes,

"You can sit down now," said the man who had spoken first as he slung the rifle over his shoulder. "Forgive us for disturbing you, but we had to make sure who was in it. God be with you."

The old woman watched them in silence as they went out from under the arch and up on to the road with the lighted torch. The goat trotted out, snorted and rapped the ground. She was brave again, now that the strangers were in retreat.

"Stop your jig-acting, Sheila," the old woman scolded. "Lie down there."

She sat down, took a saucepan from within the box and poured the cooked porridge into it. She scooped out every morsel from the bottom of the skillet with a wooden spoon. Then she poured salt on to the smoking meal from a snuff-box. She crossed herself, said grace and began to eat.

"They are gentle people," she said to the goat after she had eaten some of the porridge. "We need have no fear of them, Sheila. They are our own kind, thank God."

Overhead, the man with the lighted torch had now climbed on to the top of the narrow wall that flanked the bridge. Two other men held him by the thighs, in order to keep him steady against the wind.

Michael stood at the centre of the bridge, with his arms folded across his chest, looking intently towards the east.

"I'm ready now," said the man with the torch.

"All right," Michael said. "Swing it slowly from side to side. Keep on swinging until they answer our signal."

A shower of sparks flew from the blazing torch as the man began to swing it over his head. The four horses, which were tied to an ash tree by the western end of the bridge, now began to neigh and prance. Excited by their cries, the ass brayed down below.

A volley of rifle shots rang out suddenly far to the east.

"That's it," Michael said. "Put out the torch and quieten the horses."

The man jumped down from the wall, laid the torch against the road and put his foot on the lighted end. The other two men ran to the horses. The rattle of gunfire quickly increased in volume. Then the crash of exploding dynamite came from the north-east.

The man with the smoking torch came over to Michael and said:

"Flatley is at work already. That's quick."

The land rose eastwards from the bridge in gently-sloping terraces. There were hardly any trees. The grey stone fences and

the white-walled cabins stood out distinctly. Mountains lined the horizon. They looked gigantic in the moonlight.

"That old woman down there," said the man with the torch as he leaned close to Michael with his back canted against the wind, "has been on the road for more than twenty-five years. Her family was one of the first that Captain Butcher evicted when he bought Manister. The village of Ballymore, where she lived, doesn't exist now. Butcher swept it off the face of the earth, at one blow. The people that were in it scattered. That old woman down there went to Clash with her husband and seven children. They caught typhus fever. They all died of it within a couple of days except herself. She went out of her mind for a while. Then she took to the road. I've been seeing her go back and forth all my life, winter and summer. She hardly ever stays more than one night in the one place. She never sleeps under a roof. She always has an ass and a cart and a goat with her. She is a holy woman. No one ever hears a wicked word out of her. She must have great breed in her to be able to live the way she does, under such terrible conditions. Mind you, she never begs, although she will take whatever is given to her in God's name. She can make lovely lace when she has a mind for it. She earns a little money that way, here and there."

The man walked over to the ash tree after he had finished speaking. The horses had quietened over there by now. Michael continued to stare fixedly towards the east. The rattle of gunfire and the rolling crash of exploding dynamite continued. Columns of yellow flame shot into the air through billowing clouds of black smoke, as hay-ricks and turf-stacks and the thatched roofs of houses were set on fire. The fires were like fantastic flowers unfolding their beauty in the night, here and there across the moonlit land. Cattle appeared far away, darting hither and thither, with their tails in the air, over patches of ground made lurid by the flames. The shrill neighing of frightened horses came faintly on the wind.

Michael turned suddenly and walked swiftly from the bridge down the path that led to the river. He paused for a little while at the entrance to the arch. The white goat trotted forward and snorted at him.

"Behave yourself, Sheila," the old woman said.

He came forward slowly to the wall and bowed with ceremony to the old woman.

"God save you," he said.

"God save you kindly," she answered him. "Did you come to warm yourself?"

She had already finished eating and washed her vessels in the river. She was drying the saucepan.

"I came to ask your blessing," he said.

"Why would a fine young man like yourself need the blessing of a poor, homeless old woman?" she said.

"I, too, am homeless," Michael said gently. "I have been homeless all my life."

The old woman put away the saucepan in her box and said:

"Bend down your face close to me, treasure. Let me see does it show the sorrow that I hear in your voice."

Michael put his hands on top of the wall and leaned towards her. She looked at his face in silence for a long time.

"Ah! Woe!" she said at length. "My sorrow is old now and yours is new. At its worst, my sorrow was little compared to yours. It came to me without warning. Yours didn't. It's terrible to wait for the lightning to strike."

Michael leaned closer to her and whispered almost inaudibly:

"No sooner did I meet my love than I had to say farewell."

The old woman touched his face in several places gently with the tips of her fingers. Then she nodded.

"I understand why you had to leave her," she said.

"Did you see that in my face?" Michael said.

"I didn't see it in your face, pulse of my heart," the old woman said.

Michael stood erect and said brusquely:

"Speak out, then, and tell me what you understand."

"Before you met her," the old woman said gently, "you were already wedded to the dark stranger."

Michael's face clouded with anger.

"You have no right to say that," he cried.

"Hush, *alannah*," the old woman whispered. "Bend down close to me again and don't be cross. I want to tell you something before I give you my blessing."

Michael looked at her fiercely for a little while.

"Forgive me, good woman," he said at length.

He shuddered, put one knee against the ground and then laid his arms along the top of the wall. He bowed his head over his hands.

"It's not long since I left her," he whispered gently. "Speak to me kindly."

Now the bellowing of cattle became loud. The rattle of gunfire continued both to the east and to the west.

"The pain of a new wound is bitter," the old woman said. "I still remember the pain of my own, when I said my farewell. Ah! Woe! When my man and my seven children died and my

village was laid low and my kindred were scattered to the four corners of the world, I went mad with loneliness."

She raised her lean hands above her head and shouted in a tone of frenzied anger:

"They took all I had."

Then she put her hands before her eyes and rocked herself.

"God forgive me for shouting," she said in a contrite whisper. "It's sinful to be angry with the dead past."

She put her hands on Michael's shoulders.

"Sweet pulse of my heart," she said tenderly, "I have no right to complain. There was one loveliness they couldn't take from me."

"What was that?" Michael said.

"Faith," she said.

"Was that what you wanted to tell me?" Michael said.

"Faith makes all things lovely," she said, "sorrow as well as joy."

"My faith is different from yours," Michael said. "It makes me do cruel things, to myself and to others."

"Be true to it, whatever it is," she cried. "That is all that counts. Be true to it till death."

The bellowing of cattle, the hoarse cries of drovers and the yelping of dogs now drowned the sound of gun-fire.

"Give me your blessing now," Michael said to her. "It's time for me to go."

She put her palms flat against the crown of his head and prayed in silence.

"Go now," she said when she had finished, "and may your faith remain strong in you."

Michael got to his feet swiftly. He took her right hand and kissed it reverently three times. Then he hurried out from under the arch.

The white goat snorted at him and rapped the ground.

"Hush, Sheila," the old woman whispered in a solemn tone. "We must be gentle with that man and show him great respect. He's on his way to meet the dark stranger."

CHAPTER XXXIV

A RED HEIFER WAS THE FIRST to come over the brow of the hill. With her tail in the air, she galloped down the long slope towards the bridge. She kept turning her raised head slowly from side to side as she ran. She left a thin trail of blood

that dripped from a gash made by a dog's teeth in her left flank. An old black cow came next, trotting swiftly on widespread legs, lowing in panic, with foam about her jaws. Her slack udder swung rhythmically, to left and right, up against her flanks.

Then a great mass of bellowing cattle surged across the brow. Their hooves made thunder on the frozen road as they came charging down the slope. The smoke from their heated bodies rose in a cloud above their backs, like a pale mane unfurled by their flight. Men and dogs harried the flanks of the column. The men chanted the hoarse cry of the drover, as they lashed at the beasts with heavy sticks. The dogs yelped and snapped at the bellies of the runners.

Men on horse-back, with lighted torches held aloft, cantered through the fields that lay adjacent to the road on either side. Far to the rear, the earth was dappled with flame from north to south, abreast of the towering dark mountains.

The red heifer and the cow charged back over the bridge as the head of the column reached the western end. Bellowing madly, they hurled themselves into the mass and became engulfed. The horde then surged across. A white-faced bullock tried to leap over his mates, in order to escape from a dog's fangs. He was carried the whole length of the bridge standing on end, his fore-legs jabbing at the air like a boxer.

They ran west through the dead forest. When they reached the rocky bluff, where the road swept sharply to the right, the horsemen forced them to go straight ahead through a wide gap in the fence. Almost at once, they began to climb over stiffly-rising ground. They slackened pace and stopped bellowing. Their hooves made hardly any sound on the thick heather. Now only the yelping of the dogs and the hoarse cries of the drovers could be heard. The riders made a wide circle about the compact mass with their lighted torches.

The ascent became more abrupt. The heather gave place to rough shore grass. There were clumps of gorse, loose boulders and patches of naked shingle. Then the circle of riders opened up in front. The cattle passed through the gap into the wide mouth of a defile. With a wild bellow, they charged forward at a gallop over the level ground. The men and dogs ran hotly in pursuit, redoubling their cries and their blows. The riders thrust their horses into the rear of the throng and set the lighted torches to the hides of the fleeing beasts.

The defile narrowed rapidly. Bleak granite rocks, that glistened in the moonlight, rose high on either side. The grass disappeared. There was only shingle under foot. The ground began to slope

gently downwards. The smell of the sea came strongly from in front. Then the land's end stood out distinctly in the gloom of night. Beyond it lay the void, filled only by the awe-inspiring thunder of the unseen waves.

The leading beasts lowed in terror and tried to turn when they saw the edge of the void close to them. They were gored by the horns of the succeeding ranks and carried sidelong down. They turned over and over as they fell, their death cries re-echoing through the cliff.

All the other beasts leaped gracefully to their doom, sailing through the void as in a dance, with heads erect and tails outstretched.

CHAPTER XXXV

NEVILLE SAT AT THE END OF the dining-room table, with his arms on the elbows of his chair and his fingers laced across his chest. His cloth-bound metal hat lay beside his revolver on the white table-cloth in front of him. He had on his waistcoat of chain mail beneath a brown tweed coat. He stared grimly at the floor between his feet.

A shrill cry of pain, coming from the direction of the library, made him sit erect and turn his head sharply to the left. He listened intently. His eyes narrowed. Deep vertical lines came into the centre of his forehead. He opened his mouth a little. The tip of his tongue came out slowly and rested against his upper lip. He remained in that posture for more than two minutes without movement, waiting in vain for a repetition of the cry. Then he sighed deeply, shuddered and bowed his head once more.

Sub-Inspector Lodge, the commander of the detachment protecting Manister House, sat at the other end of the table with District Inspector Gregg. Lodge was finishing his breakfast. Gregg sipped at a glass of whisky. It was he who had taken Fenton's place at Clash.

"I couldn't do a blasted thing," Lodge said irritably, "beyond returning their fire. I have only a small detachment here, you know, barely sufficient to cover the house properly."

He pushed aside his empty plate and began to pour fresh tea into his cup. He was a sallow-faced man of slight build and youthful appearance, with high cheek-bones and mobile brown eyes. He looked exhausted. There were dark circles under his eyes. The skin on his face was strained almost to breaking point.

He had some difficulty in directing the spout of the tea-pot towards the mouth of the cup.

"I rode over the estate after daylight," he continued. "I must say that the Fenians were very thorough. A swarm of locusts could not possibly have been more devastating."

Gregg nodded. He was a big man with twinkling blue eyes, a mottled face, long grey moustaches and a completely bald crown.

"Sorry I couldn't get here sooner," he said, "but I had my own hands full. I just got to Clash on the seven o'clock train last evening. A few hours later, before I had time to unpack, the Fenians began to give me a hearty Irish welcome. They kept it up most of the night."

"Throwing cattle over a cliff is a new one on me," Lodge said.

"It used to be common in my young days," Gregg said. "The idea is to have the animals carried out to sea and not found again for identification. In that way, the proprietor can whistle for his compensation. You know, of course, that the county only pays when a recognizable portion of the carcass is produced."

There was another shriek. It was repeated again and again. There was such agony in the high-pitched voice that all three men were now compelled to raise their heads and listen.

"Who is the fellow?" Gregg said to Lodge, when the screaming came to an end.

"Cooney is his name," Lodge said. "Used to be schoolmaster in this village, before he went off with the Fenians. We caught him sneaking towards the house a couple of hours ago. He offered to betray O'Dwyer into our hands. His story sounded very fishy to me, so I asked my fellows to take him into the library and . . ."

He was interrupted by Neville, who pushed back his chair with violence and jumped to his feet.

"I've come to a decision," Neville said.

The other two men stared at the landowner in surprise. He had a bright red spot at the centre of each cheek.

"What decision, Captain Butcher?" Lodge said.

Neville picked up his metal hat with both hands and pulled it down tightly over his skull.

"I've decided to take him at his word," he said.

He seized his revolver, broke it, glanced at the loaded chambers and snapped it shut again.

"Do you mean the prisoner?" Lodge said as he got to his feet.

Neville strode down to the other end of the table. His heavy field boots made a loud sound on the carpet.

"Gentlemen," he said in a tone of great excitement, "I've just had a hunch."

"What is your hunch, Captain Butcher?" Gregg said.

"I'm going to kill O'Dwyer this morning," Neville said solemnly.

"Really?" said Gregg. "How do you propose to do it?"

"Let me have four of your men," Neville said. "I'll attend to the rest."

"Impossible, Captain Butcher," Lodge interposed. "Even if the fellow genuinely intended to collaborate with us, which I doubt, we couldn't possibly let you tackle this on your own. You have neither eaten nor slept for several days. You are in no fit state . . ."

"Nonsense, Lodge," Neville said as he slapped the younger officer on the back in a patronising fashion. "This is something you don't understand. I grant you that I've felt damned low during the past few days. Who wouldn't have felt low in my place? All that is dead and gone now. I have a long-standing account to settle with O'Dwyer and this is my opportunity for closing it. I have always regarded him as my personal enemy. I have no choice but to accept his challenge."

He turned to Gregg and added:

"You look like my sort of man. Let me have four of your fellows."

Gregg twirled the ends of his moustaches as he stared suspiciously at the excited landowner.

"What do you mean by saying that you have no choice but to accept O'Dwyer's challenge?" he said gently.

Neville started. His small eyes assumed an expression of great cunning. The back of his neck reddened.

"Did I say that?" he said. "If so, it was a figure of speech, you understand . . ."

Gregg continued to stare in silence for a few moments. Then he turned to Lodge.

"I'd like to hear the prisoner's story," he said. "Have him come here."

Lodge marched to the door that led into the drawing-room.

"They may have persuaded him to tell the truth by now," he said, throwing the door wide open.

The drawing-room was in great disorder. The furniture had been piled as a barricade against the windows, in which nearly all the glass was broken. A number of constables were now going to and fro wearily, hauling the various articles back to their proper places. The carpet was rolled up in a clumsy heap to one

side. Lodge's boots rang out sharply on the naked floor as he marched down the room towards the library.

"We of the Constabulary," Gregg said calmly to Neville, "can't allow ourselves the luxury of acting on impulse, in a situation of this sort. We have to proceed with extreme caution."

Neville began to pace back and forth, with his hands behind his back. The bright patches on his cheeks had grown much larger.

"I tell you my hunches have never proved wrong," he said. "I know this fellow Cooney. I've kept an eye on him since he came to the village. Knowing he was a Fenian, I felt certain that he'd come in handy one day as an informer. He is the type, you know, fond of drink, good company, petticoats and dancing. He's good-looking and effeminate. That sort of fellow always has his price."

He halted and struck the table a violent blow with his knuckles.

"I knew that one of the swine would turn traitor sooner or later," he cried. "One of them always does, when things begin to get really hot."

"Here he comes now," Gregg said in a detached tone.

Lodge marched into the room ahead of the prisoner and said:

"We've been unable to get anything further out of him so far."

The prisoner shuffled along painfully, with a sergeant holding him by the right arm and a constable by the left.

"Seat him here," Gregg said, indicating a chair that stood near his own.

The escort seated the hapless young schoolmaster.

"You questioned him pretty thoroughly, did you?" Gregg said to the sergeant.

Sergeant Symes brought his heels together and stood rigidly at attention. He had a huge red neck and a flat face. His nose and ears showed the scars of many wounds. He had been a prize-fighter at one time.

"Beg to report, sir," he said in a hoarse voice, "that we tried every way we could to make him budge, but he continues to trot out the same story. I never in my life came across such a tough little fellow, sir."

"What's your opinion, sergeant?" said Gregg. "Is he a wrong one?"

The sergeant glanced at the prisoner for a moment and screwed up his eyes.

"I'd call it an even-money bet, sir," he said. "He's tough, all right."

Gregg poured some whisky into a glass, which he offered to the prisoner.

"Here you are, lad," he said in a fatherly tone. "You look a if you could do with a little of this."

Instead of taking the offered glass, Cooney seized Gregg's hand and kissed it several times with fervour.

"For the love and honour of God," he said in a whining tone, "protect me from them. They did terrible things to me. Don't let them touch me again."

Gregg took away his hand gently and said:

"Drink this whisky and tell me your story. If you tell me the truth, nobody is going to touch you. Have no fear of that."

Neville swore under his breath as he began to pace the floor again.

"Sheer waste of time," he muttered. "Every moment counts when the iron is hot."

Cooney sobbed aloud for a little while. Then he picked up the glass and swallowed all the whisky.

"God spare your health," he said gratefully to Gregg.

"Out with it now, lad," Gregg said. "Don't be afraid. I guarantee you fair treatment, on my honour as a gentleman."

Cooney shuddered. His whole face was battered and swollen almost beyond recognition. One eye was completely closed. His hair was matted with blood. His speech was blurred by the distortion of his lips.

"Three of us are in the plan to hand over Michael O'Dwyer," he said. "The other two are Tommy De Burgo and Joe Beggs. They sent me to do the talking because I'm known to Captain Butcher. We have O'Dwyer in a house not very far from here. His left leg is broken below the knee. He got thrown from his horse during the cattle drive. Big Bill Flatley is coming after dark to move him. You have until noon to take him. Tommy and Joe are on guard. They'll be relieved at noon by Peter Cook and Jerry O'Meara, who are now asleep in the house. Here is the plan Tommy made. I'm to be given the reward of three hundred sovereigns now, together with free pardons for the three of us, all signed and sealed. Then Captain Butcher and not more than four policemen are to come with me on a cart that has a crib on it. The tail-board of the crib must be fastened. I must be driving. The five men with me must be standing up in the crib. If everything is all right, I'll give a certain signal at a certain place. If I get the answering signal at a certain other place the cart will halt. The tail-board will be unfastened and Captain Butcher will come down. Then the tail-board will be fastened tight again, leaving the other four men inside the cart. Captain Butcher will advance with me. Joe Beggs will advance with O'Dwyer from the opposite side. He'll have O'Dwyer roped down on top of a

hand-cart that's at the house. The four policemen will keep me covered during the advance. Tommy will keep Captain Butcher covered. In that way, there will be no danger of treachery. Then the exchange will be made and both parties will retire free and easy. On the other hand, if I don't give the signal agreed upon, nothing at all will happen."

There was silence for a little while. Gregg kept twirling the ends of his moustaches as he looked steadily at Cooney. Now his eyes no longer twinkled. They had become hard.

"Is that all you feel like telling me, lad?" he said gently.

"That's all, sir," Cooney said. "I'm under oath not to tell any more, for fear there might be treachery. It's well known that the police get full information from many a poor lad beforehand and then claim the reward for themselves. So . . ."

"Who is Tommy De Burgo?" Gregg interrupted.

"He comes from Sligo," Cooney said. "He was a bank clerk in that town. Then he got in with moonlighters, through a fondness for drink and devilment. His crowd 'carded' an informer one night. They scraped the man's back so terribly with the cards that he died on the spot. Although Tommy wasn't there when the deed was done, the police came after him. He ran down here on his keeping and joined O'Dwyer. A few weeks ago, though, when he heard the men that killed the informer were caught and hanged, all four of them, he got mad with himself for becoming an outlaw, since he was wanted no longer. So he thought of this plan for getting to America with a few sovereigns in his pocket."

"What about Joe Beggs?" said Gregg.

"It's revenge Joe is after, more than the money," Cooney said. "He is in love with Biddy Sweeney, that had her lovely golden hair shaved for walking out with a policeman a short while back, over in Ballyroche. Joe says she was innocent and that she was reported by another girl out of spite. He asked O'Dwyer to prevent the Committee from condemning her unjustly. When O'Dwyer wouldn't listen to him . . ."

"What about yourself, lad?" Gregg interrupted, leaning towards the prisoner and making his voice still more gentle. "Why are you betraying your leader?"

Cooney raised his head very slowly and looked into Gregg's eyes. He started violently. Then he began to tremble.

"I'm afraid," he said. "I want to get out of the country. That's all."

Gregg leaned still farther towards the prisoner, who now sat absolutely motionless, as if hypnotised.

"Why do you insist on Captain Butcher coming with you in the cart?" Gregg said.

"Because we know him to be a man of his word," Cooney replied. "He is a hard man, but he never breaks his given word. Ever since he came to Manister, he has never been known to break his given word. That's why we want him and nobody else. We trust him. He has never broken . . ."

Gregg suddenly drew back his head and struck the table a violent blow with the flat of his hand.

"Take him back to the library," he shouted fiercely. "Give it to him properly this time. Torture the lying little cur until you make him tell the truth. Give it to him."

Cooney uttered a piercing shriek and threw himself to the ground at Gregg's feet. He clasped the District Inspector's knees tightly in his arms. The escort rushed forward to seize him. Gregg halted them by holding up his right hand. Everybody in the room listened intently as the prisoner began to speak.

"Don't do it, sir," he moaned. "Don't do it. I can only tell you the truth, no matter what you do. Oh! For the love of God, sir, have mercy on me."

Neville uttered an exclamation of disgust and marched around the table. He clicked his heels as he came to a halt beside Gregg.

"I told you it was a sheer waste of time," he said angrily.

Gregg sighed and said to the prisoner, in the same gentle tone as before:

"All right, lad. You may get up now."

As the escort helped the prisoner back into his chair, Gregg got to his feet slowly and turned towards Neville.

"Well?" Neville said.

Gregg stared at the landowner in silence for a little while. Then he nodded solemnly.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE BLACK HORSE TROTTED QUICKLY for nearly three miles to the north-west from Manister House, along a winding level road that lay abreast of the mountains. Then he slowed down to a laborious walk as he turned sharply to the east and began to climb a long steep hill. Here the surface of the road was deeply pocked and strewn with loose stones. The heavy red wheels of the cart now rocked from side to side continuously. The

men standing within the tall green crib had to spread their legs wide and grip the sides with their hands in order to maintain their balance.

Cooney had his back to the other five, as he leaned against the front wall, with the reins in one hand and a long-handled whip in the other. The peak of his grey cap was drawn down over his injured eye, in order to shield it from the piercing wind. The other eye stared straight ahead with a look of bitter triumph. When the cart was near the top of the hill, he raised the whip above his head to the full length of his arm. He twirled it three times slowly and then cracked it over the horse's back.

Neville stood immediately behind Cooney, with his revolver pointed at the schoolmaster's back. When he saw the signal, he glanced sharply over his right shoulder at the four policemen that stood close together in the rear. They straightened themselves, shuffled their feet nervously and fingered their carbines. Their faces looked tense.

The call of a curlew was repeated three times, somewhere in front, as the cart reached the summit of the hill. Level ground stretched ahead for a distance of four hundred yards. The narrow road was completely covered with grass, except for two shallow parallel tracks made by the rare vehicles that passed. There was a ramshackle stone fence on either side, about three feet high and partly overgrown with briars. A bog lay to the right. There was a ruined cabin, to which a weed-grown path led from the road in a straight line, a short distance within the bog. To the left the ground was rocky and uneven. Most of it was covered with thick brush-wood. Tall stone mounds, some of them partly sculpted, stood at intervals among the bushes. They had been raised in memory of the dead that were carried along that road to the cemetery.

Cooney halted the cart when he came abreast of the first memorial mound, about fifty yards from the brow of the hill. He fastened the reins to the top of the crib and turned round.

"Let down the tail-board now," he said to the policemen. "This is the place where Captain Butcher comes with me."

The policemen glanced at Neville. He nodded. Then two of them unfastened the tail-board and stood it to one side within the crib. Cooney jumped down to the road. He was immediately followed by Neville.

"Now fasten the tail-board again," Cooney said to the policemen.

Neville wheeled and discharged his revolver point blank into the schoolmaster's side. Then he leaped towards the left and

crashed over the top of the stone fence into a bed of tall, withered ferns. Cooney turned almost completely round after being hit. Then he bent forward, put both hands to his left side and fell with his right shoulder to the road. He kicked with his left foot three times. Then he rolled over slowly on to his back and lay still.

Three of the policemen jumped from the rear of the cart when Neville fired. They followed the landowner over the fence and into the bed of ferns. The fourth man got jostled by a comrade as he was about to jump. He fell to his buttocks on the tail of the cart, with his legs dangling. The horse bolted at that instant. The cart was jerked from beneath the constable. He fell to the road on his back. He got to his feet at once and plunged towards the fence. A volley of shots came from the brush-wood. One of the bullets struck him in the left shoulder. He dropped his carbine to the side of the road and fell forward across the fence. As his comrades pulled him down among the ferns by the head, another bullet pierced his right thigh.

"Let him lie there for a minute," Neville growled at the other three men, as they went to aid their wounded comrade.

He made them take up firing positions in an arc, facing the Fenians, on the edge of the fern-bed.

"Keep up a steady fire," he said. "I'm going to flank them. Charge when you hear me shout."

He crawled away to the left on his belly as the three men began to answer the Fenian fire with their carbines. He got to his feet after going a short distance through the ferns. He ran forward stooping, at right angles to the road, under cover of a dip in the ground. He bore to the right after going twenty yards. Then he dropped to one knee in the brush as he sighted the Fenians. They were closing rapidly with the policemen, firing from behind the memorial mounds as they advanced. Michael was leading them.

"Ha!" Neville cried exultantly under his breath. "I have him at last. My hunch was right."

The bright patches returned to the centre of his cheeks as he raised his revolver and took careful aim. He fired when his enemy was less than ten yards away. The bullet went through Michael's brain. He fell like a stone.

"Charge!" Neville bellowed as he leaped to his feet and tore through the brush. "Charge! Charge! Charge!"

Three bullets struck him in the armoured waistcoat and one in the right arm without arresting his progress. Then a fifth bullet passed through his mouth and lodged in the back of his neck. He

dropped. They came up to him and fired three times into his head.

Instead of charging, the policemen threw up their hands and began to scream:

"Don't kill us, lads. Spare our lives, for the love of God. We're Irish, too."

CHAPTER XXXVII

RAOUL AWOKE JUST AS THE CHAPEL bell of a convent near his jail began to toll the Angelus. He remained lying on his back, as he had slept, until the last melodious note had faded into silence. Then he turned over on his side, rested his cheek against his palm and waited to hear the hansom cab that passed each morning on its way to meet the early train. He sighed with pleasure as the first faint beat of the horse's hooves reached him from afar. Then he heard the delicate jingle of small harness bells break in upon the mounting rhythm of the trotting hooves. A little later, there was a dull rumble of wheels as the cab passed over a short wooden bridge. Almost immediately afterwards, the symphony began to diminish in volume. When the hoof beats were again barely audible in the distance, a factory whistle blew a long strident blast, calling its workers to their tasks. He shuddered. The harsh sound of the whistle reminded him of the letter he had received from Elizabeth during the previous evening.

The warder went down the corridor at half-past six, rapping on each cell door with a heavy key. When the man rapped again five minutes later on the return journey, Raoul swung his legs to the floor. He sat on the side of his cot, still brooding over the letter, until the cell door opened and an old man entered to light the gas. Then he got to his feet, dressed himself and made his bed. At seven he walked in the corridor with the other prisoners, while the basins were being emptied and oakum distributed for the day's work. Then they locked him in his cell once more. At eight they gave him his breakfast of bread and milk.

After he had eaten, he took out Elizabeth's letter and began again to read the passage that had disturbed him.

"Needless to say," Elizabeth wrote, "Michael's death was less of a shock to me than it was to Lettice. The dear child has plenty of courage, but she is still somewhat stunned by the terrible blow. She begs to be forgiven for not writing to you this time. She says that you will understand. Poor Michael! He was one of those on

whose foreheads tragedy is written for even the least intelligent to read. God forgive me! I hated him at first. I knew instinctively that there never could be peace where he was and that to know him meant to suffer. Later on, though, I came to love him deeply. So that his going is a great loss to me. Of course, one cannot feel sorrow in the ordinary way for one so strong and so certain of his purpose. It would be like a common sparrow mourning a royal eagle, that has fallen in all its glory. The people certainly don't mourn for him. On the contrary, they feel proud and triumphant, as if they had won a great victory. Perhaps it is that his spirit has passed into them. Raoul, I have never in my life seen anything like his funeral. The whole parish was there. Thousands of other people came from far and near. Yet it was the public emotion, rather than the numbers, that was so impressive. I got completely carried away by the sincere love visible in every eye. I didn't think our people were capable of it. It seems they are. As I said before, pride was the dominant note. When they wept, it was for our brave little schoolmaster. I find it hard to understand how such a wayward and seemingly weak man could prove to be a hero. Yet there it is. One really knows very little about the human soul. Father Cornelius is a case in point. I had entertained harsh thoughts of him for some time. Now I have completely reversed my opinion. He has behaved wonderfully towards us during our crisis. I was moved to tears by the beautiful sermon he preached in praise of Michael and the schoolmaster. Of course, our cynical Tim Ahearn maintains that Father Cornelius is merely swimming with the tide like a skilful politician, now that the landlords are certain to be defeated, owing to the Americans and the English factory workers supporting Ireland's cause. Tim always sees the worst side of things. It is true that Father Cornelius, like all of us, has his bad side, if shrewdness is to be considered bad. Yet one must face facts. It requires courage for a priest to come out openly on his altar and preach a sermon in praise of two Fenians that died in action. Coercion is at its height. The Government has sent a battalion of Scottish infantry to Clash, with orders to cow the people at all costs, no matter how brutal their behaviour. The ruffians need little encouragement. The Constabulary are completely discredited, as they have been unable to make a single arrest in connection with Captain Butcher's death. The Government people are furious at the handsome way the Fenians behaved towards the four policemen they captured, merely taking their military equipment and then turning them loose, after having attended to the wounded man. Tyrants fear disciplined opponents. By the way, Father

Cornelius is preparing a tremendous reception for you on your . . .”

“Damn Father Cornelius!” said Raoul as he put away the letter.

He was very agitated. He sat down and began to pick oakum in an effort to regain his calm. The senseless labour merely irritated him still further. After a while, he threw the pieces of foul rope back into the basket and clasped his hands before his chest. He looked up at the little window. A faint ray of sunshine was creeping along the iron bars. He was overcome by an almost unbearable loneliness.

He threw back his head and cried out with great fervour:

“Oh! How I envy him the way he died!”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

RAOUL WAS BEWILDERED BY THE huge throng that awaited him at Clash railway station on his release from jail. As the train came slowly to a halt, three large brass bands played a triumphal march. The music was barely audible above the cheering of an enormous throng that stood in the market place beyond the tall iron railings. The platform was crowded with notable people from all over the county. There were mayors in their robes and chains of office, other public officials wearing ornamented sashes over their morning suits, officers of patriotic societies with beribboned badges pinned to their chests, over thirty priests of all ranks and scores of distinguished private citizens. Lettice and Elizabeth stood at the very front of this multitude, accompanied by the master of ceremonies and by the representatives of the Press. Both were dressed in deep mourning.

As Raoul stepped from the carriage, the important people on the platform uncovered their heads and bowed ceremoniously. The people in the market place threw their hats into the air and redoubled their cheering. Lettice and Elizabeth came forward and embraced Raoul. Then the master of ceremonies took charge. An address of welcome was read in most flowery language by a tall and handsome old parish priest. Several other men also delivered short addresses. Then the party advanced to a large, brightly painted carriage that stood waiting outside the station. Four bob-tailed grey horses, all in splendid condition and carefully groomed, were harnessed to the carriage. Raoul mounted after taking leave of the reception committee. Lettice sat beside

him. Elizabeth sat opposite. Preceded by the three brass bands, the carriage advanced at a stately pace towards the town square. A long column of other carriages came after it. The crowd surged along on all sides, singing patriotic songs.

After they had gone a little way, Raoul turned to Elizabeth and said in a tone of annoyance:

"Whose carriage is this?"

Elizabeth was beaming. She obviously enjoyed every bit of the fuss that was being made of her brother.

"Father Cornelius insisted on your having it," she said. "To-day, he said, you are a guest of the county. This carriage comes from the livery stables here in town. It's a very good thing, in any case, that Tim Ahearn is not driving us. We would have been disgraced before this vast crowd. You've no idea to what extent he has relapsed into his slovenly habits since you went to jail."

"So I'm a guest of Father Costigan," said Raoul, putting his fingers to the tip of his beard.

"You are a guest of the people," Elizabeth said. "They are all grateful to you."

"*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*," Raoul said.

"What's that?" said Elizabeth.

"They very obviously think that I, too, am dead," Raoul said, "and therefore no longer a menace to them."

"Don't be frivolous, Raoul," said Elizabeth. "Please raise your hat and bow to these good people who are cheering you."

"Must I?" said Raoul as he raised his hat and bowed in all directions. "Father Francis didn't come to meet me, I see."

"It's not because he doesn't love you," Lettice said. "It's just that he is very sensitive about appearing in public where there are other priests."

"Father Francis is very sensitive," Elizabeth said.

"I understand," said Raoul. "I thought of him a great deal while I was in jail. He has become very important to me."

"To all of us," Lettice said with feeling.

"Good Heavens!" said Raoul. "What is happening now?"

"I beg of you to behave, Raoul," said Elizabeth anxiously. "This is a further little surprise staged by Father Cornelius."

The carriage was now passing through the square, abreast of the headless English general. A group of bare-headed young athletes seized the horses, brought them to a halt and began to unfasten the harness. At the same time, from the direction of the Manister road, Father Cornelius came riding on a magnificent bay hunter. He was followed by a troop of fifty horsemen. He

dismounted with a supple grace of a young man when he reached the carriage.

"Mr. St. George," cried the parish priest in his tremendous bass voice, after he had doffed his hat and made a low bow, "I welcome you on your release from jail, in the name of Manister and of its people. Long may you live to enjoy the reverence that will always be paid to you, as a patriot and a benefactor."

He came forward to the side of the carriage with outstretched right hand. Raoul hesitated for a fraction of a second. Then he uncovered himself and shook hands with Father Cornelius. There was a great roar of applause. Father Cornelius got into the carriage and sat beside Elizabeth. In the meantime, the young athletes had harnessed themselves to the carriage in place of the horses. The march towards Manister began, with the great throng singing and the bands playing triumphal music. Father Cornelius kept raising his hat and bowing, just as if the whole affair were in his own honour. Raoul stared straight in front of him.

The excitement subsided a little after the procession had left the town. Then Father Cornelius turned to Raoul and spoke in his most charming tone.

"When I said just now," he declared, "that the people would reverence you as a benefactor, it was not an idle phrase. Your method of fighting tyranny has now been adopted by the whole of Ireland."

He leaned forward a little and continued to speak in a more intimate tone, on a lower key.

"I thought your idea wonderful from the very beginning," he said, "although I dared not say so in public. My freedom of action is very limited in matters of politics. Priests can only follow their flock. If they try to lead, or to initiate new policies, no matter how good, the enemies of the Church are at once in full cry, claiming that there is a clerical plot to seize temporal power."

He leaned back again, smiled and said gaily:

"The people have given a name of their own, though, to your invention."

"Really?" said Raoul with interest. "What is it?"

"They were unhappy about the word 'isolation,'" Father Cornelius said. "It sounded foreign to them. In any case, when they adopted your method of waging war, they modified it considerably, in order that it might conform to the needs of practical politics. Your idea, as you had conceived it, was revolutionary in its method and in its purpose. The people, of course, do not want revolution or extreme measures. They simply want reforms, constitutionally achieved. So they really had to find a new name

for it. Then a land agent named Captain Cunningham Boycott, a blustering Englishman employed by Lord Erne, incurred the displeasure of the Land League a few weeks ago. The people at once decided that they had found the proper name. Already it has spread like wild-fire."

"What is the name?" said Raoul, becoming agitated.

"Boycott," said Father Cornelius, slapping his thigh.

"Boycott?" cried Raoul in horror.

"Boycott is now the word on everybody's lips," cried Father Cornelius, bursting into laughter.

"It's beastly," said Raoul. "First of all they geld my idea and deprive it of its power. Then they make it serve their vulgar ambitions in its mutilated state. As a final insult, they baptise it in their own image, by giving it the name of some common lout."

Father Cornelius had now stopped laughing. He was looking at Raoul with some concern.

"Oh! Come now, Mr. St. George," he said in an appealing tone. "You must be generous. Great men must always be generous. They owe it as a compensation to less gifted people."

He made a gesture with his open hands as if he were caressing a globe.

"The word 'boycott' has a fullness," he said, "and a certain good-natured humanity, which is symbolic of this bloodless way to fight tyranny."

"I spent more than twenty years of my life," said Raoul bitterly, "trying . . ."

He stopped speaking as he felt his daughter's fingers close about his hand. He turned towards her.

"You once told me," she whispered, "that it is a very fortunate poet who is able to realise even one-millionth part of his dream."

Father Cornelius tactfully turned to Elizabeth and began to tell her a humorous story about a mutual acquaintance.

"You are the apple of my eye," Raoul whispered to Lettice as he pressed her hand.

"The important thing is that the people are now united," Lettice said earnestly. "You always said that unity is the only foundation upon which discipline can be built. No matter how small this beginning may seem to be, our people have begun their march."

Tears came into Raoul's eyes as he looked at her gentle loveliness. Her ecstasy of motherhood, now coming to a climax, had already conquered the bitterness of her tragedy. There was only rapture in her eyes.

"You are the apple of my eye," he repeated.

Still clasping her hand, he looked out upon the land that had again renewed its beauty in the fire of spring. A passionate love of his native earth surged through his blood as he saw the bright shimmer of sunlight on the green leaves of the trees, on the running water of a roadside brook, on the faraway mountain peaks, on the young crops that were thrusting upwards from the black ploughed fields.

Then he recalled how Michael used to look upwards, with unblinking eyes, in reverie.

He felt humbled and exalted before the unending march of life.

CHAPTER XXXIX

RAOUL AND FATHER FRANCIS JUMPED to their feet as they heard a cry of pain from overhead. Tim Ahearn ran to them on tip-toe along the flagstones from the gable end of the house. The three men listened intently with their heads raised. All they could now hear was the insect tumult of the drowsy summer afternoon about them on the terrace. There was dead silence within the house.

"The doctor and the midwife have been up there for more than an hour," Tim Ahearn grumbled. "It's how they must be getting into each other's way. Either one of them could have done whatever there is to be done long ago."

Raoul touched Father Francis on the arm and said:

"Let's finish our game."

The two men sat down again to the chess table and stared gravely at their embattled pieces on the board. Ahearn scratched his skull beneath his hat as he stood watching them.

Raoul picked up a knight very deliberately, held it poised for some time and then put it down elsewhere with a grunt of triumph.

"Check!" he said.

Ahearn shrugged his shoulders and walked slowly down the terrace.

"How can they play chess at a time like this?" he muttered.

He had just begun once more to prune the rose bushes at the gable end when another cry came from overhead. Now it was the harsh screech of a new-born infant that he heard.

"Praised be God!" he cried joyously, striking his breast, as he ran full tilt back along the terrace.

Raoul and Father Francis upset the chess table as they rose. The three of them ran into the living-room. The infant shrieked again as they hurried across the floor. Then Elizabeth entered from the hall.

"What is it, Lizzie?" Raoul cried excitedly.

Elizabeth's little face looked very proud and happy. She picked up her skirts and began to march down the room before answering her brother.

"It's Raoul Francis," she said after she had taken three or four steps.

Annie Fitzpatrick came into the room and grabbed Ahearn by the arm.

"You have to go to the village for me," she said as she pushed him towards the door.

"How is herself?" Ahearn whispered.

"How would she be but in the pink of condition?" Annie cried in pretended anger. "Arrah! Sure she's walking on the stars after bringing a lovely baby boy into the world."

"Praised be God!" Ahearn kept repeating as he went down the hall.

Raoul and Father Francis stood with their hands on one another's shoulders. They were both trembling.

"So we have work to do, you and I," Raoul said.

"So it seems," Father Francis said. "In God's name, we have the young generation to train."

"It will be wonderful work," Raoul said.

Arm in arm, they went out on to the terrace, babbling about the future like excited children.

Elizabeth sat down at her desk to enter the new birth into the family record. As she dipped her pen into the ink, tears of joy came into her eyes. She had to drop the pen and put her hands to her face, in an effort to contain her emotion.

As she listened with her face covered to the happy talk of the two men on the terrace, it was made manifest to her that all the tragedy and tumult of the past year had been brought to an end by the miracle of birth.

It was also made manifest to her that suffering, which she had feared so much in her barren loneliness, is a dark tournament that must always precede the enjoyment of life's fullness.

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